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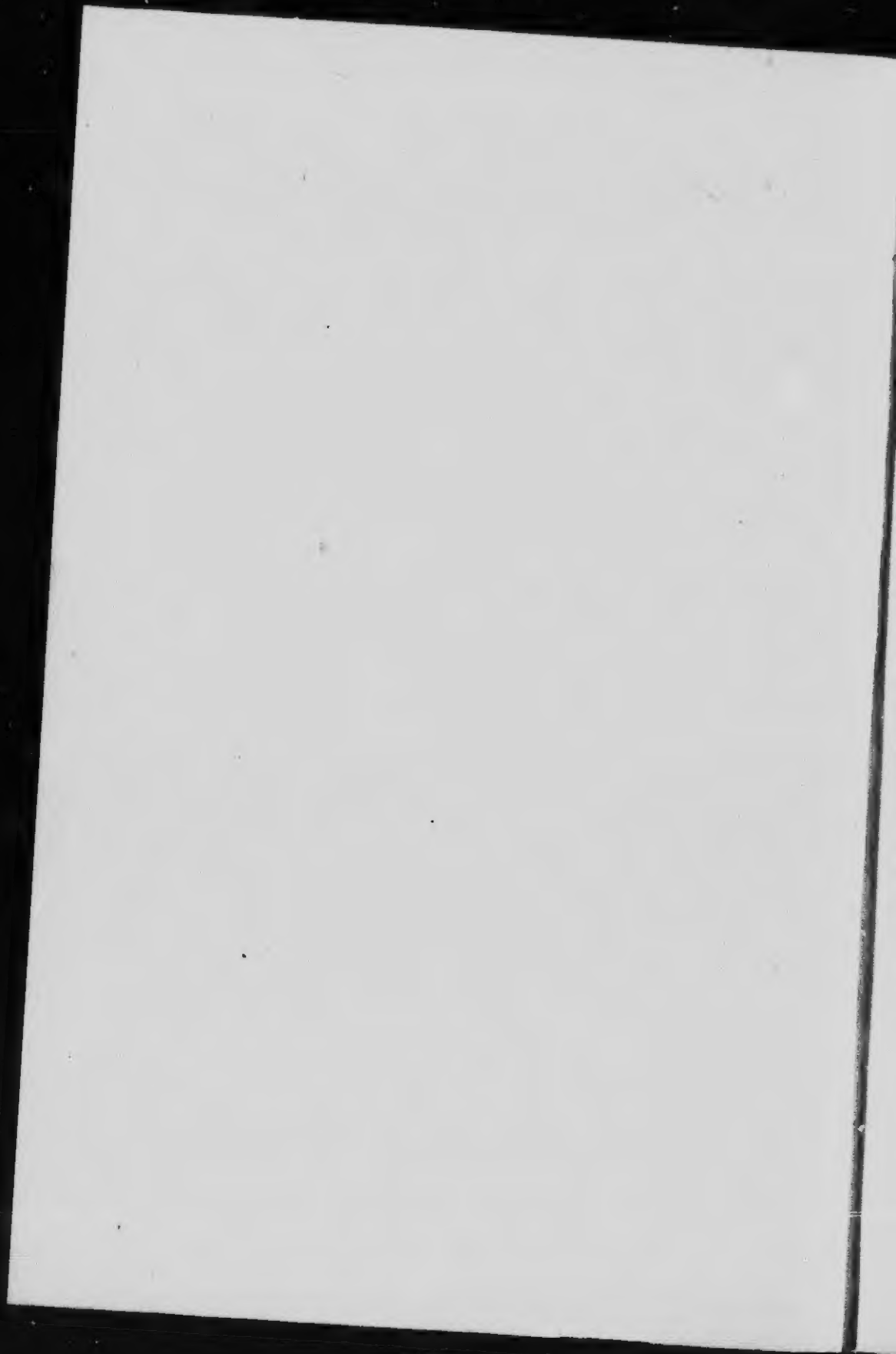
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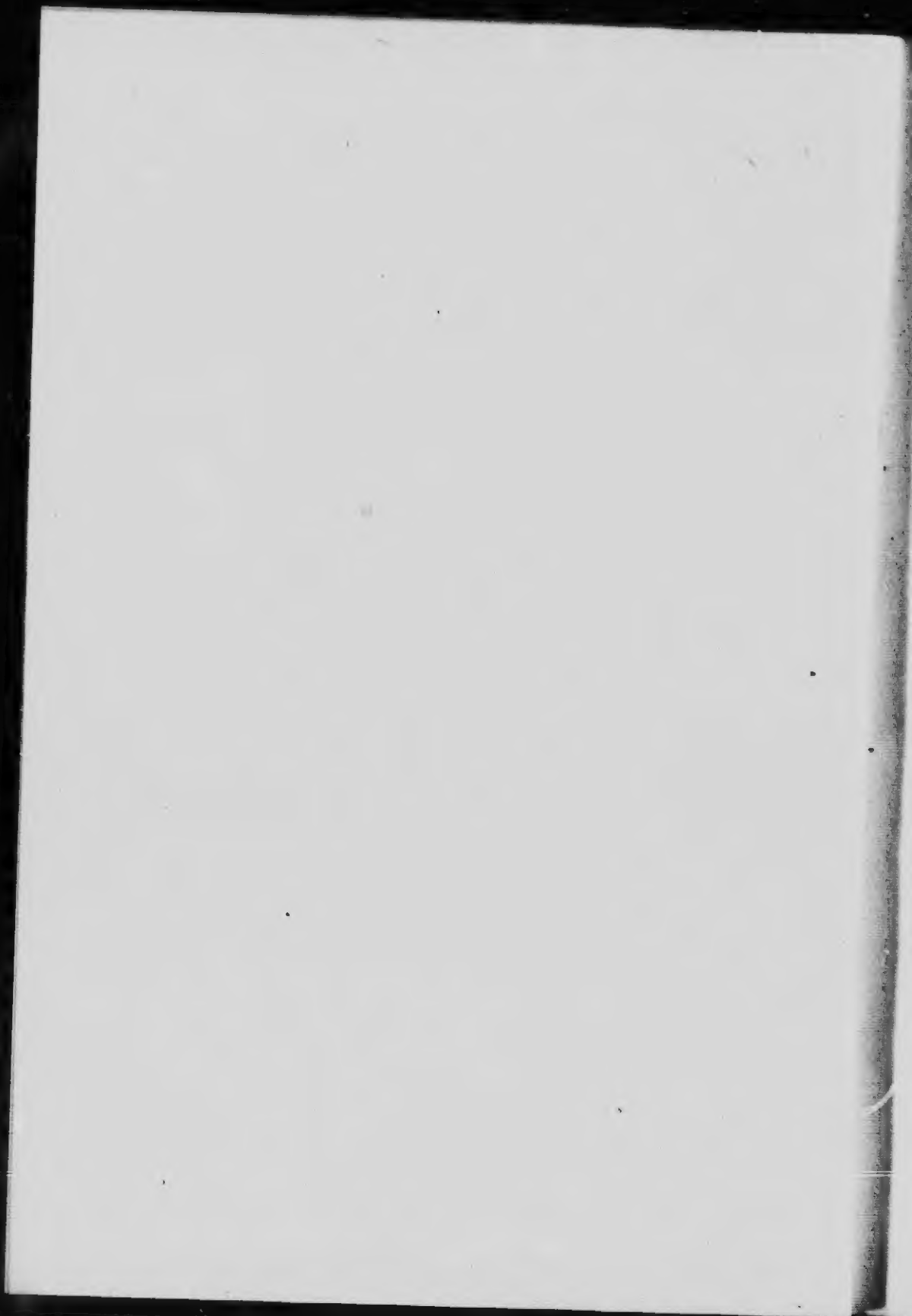
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IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM



IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM



By DORA FARNCOMB

AUTHOR OF
"THE VISION OF HIS FACE"



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LONDON CANADA

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR
THE VISION OF HIS FACE
STAR-LED TO THE HEIGHTS

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TO
MY DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER
WHO ARE
WITH THE KING
IN HIS
PARADISE GARDEN

My Beloved is gone down to His garden,
To the beds of spices,
To feed in the gardens and to gather lilies.

Thou that dwellest in the gardens,
The companions hearken to Thy Voice:
Cause me to hear it.

—CANT. vi. 2 : viii. 13.

PREFACE

THIS book, like *The Vision of His Face*, consists largely of extracts reprinted from "Hope's Quiet Hour,"—which is published every week in *The Farmer's Advocate*, but is not issued in book form.

The Bible contains many passages in which God's people are spoken of as a "garden" or "vineyard," under His special care.

I know that this book is very faulty and that my metaphors are often mixed ; but I have faithfully tried to deliver the message committed to me—the glad tidings that the Owner of the Garden never leaves it for a moment, and never trusts His precious plants in any hands less tender than His own.

DORA FARNCOMB

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TORONTO, CANADA,
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CONTENTS

I. IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM	1
II. A LIVING GARDEN	15
III. WATERED AND KEPT	26
IV. SEEKING THE MASTER	32
V. IN HIS GARDEN OF LILIES	41
VI. SPRINGTIME IN THE GARDEN	53
VII. GROWING IN SUNSHINE	62
VIII. BEAUTY AND FRUITFULNESS	75
IX. KNOWN BY FRUITS	87
X. THE PRUNING OF FRUIT-BEARING BRANCHES	101
XI. THE DESERT RECLAIMED	112
XII. TRANSPLANTED BY THE KING	124

IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM

CHAPTER I

IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM

He will make the wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD ; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.—ISA. li. 3.

GOD evidently intended His dear earth-children to work and rest in a garden, a place of beauty and fruitfulness, filled with trees "pleasant to the sight and good for food." When we speak of our life on earth as "a tedious, weary march through a wilderness," we are not describing it as our Father intended it to be, but as man has made it.

Sin can change the fairest garden into a wilderness. If you break down the fence so that the plants will be trampled by man and beast, if you sow weeds recklessly and take no care of the flowers and trees, your garden will soon become desolate.

But God did not permit sinners to spoil His garden. Sin could have no abiding place there, so our first parents went sadly out and the way of the Tree of Life was guarded by a sword of flame.

We know that this sad story is only the first chapter in the great Romance of God's love for His people. He has said : "I will betroth thee

2 IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM

unto Me for ever ;" and again : "thy Maker is thy Husband ; "and again : "I will betroth thee unto Me in lovingkindness and in mercies." His loyalty and faithfulness can never fail, in spite of the weakness and waywardness of His chosen.

If we turn from the first chapter of the story to the glorious sequel, as seen in vision by St. John, we find the garden transformed into a city—the Holy City, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. It cannot be anything but a city, for there are the orderly homes of a multitude which no earthly city could make room for, gathered in from every people and nation. Within its widely-flung gates crowd all those who have been victors in the fight, and who have a right to eat of the Tree of Life, which was in the midst of the garden and around which the golden City has grown. The Tree of Life—the True Vine—is in the midst of the street and on either side of the great river of Water of Life, which flows from the Throne of God. Every month those who pass along the shining streets may gather fruit from the overhanging branches. There is not an hour in a lifetime when a man who turns to Christ for food and healing need go away disappointed.

"In the midst of the street" He may be found. As we walk along the pavements of an earthly city, or ride in a crowded car at the "rush hour," closer than the people who press against us is our Lord.

IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM

3

Though we may seem to be breathing the dusty air of a city street—not the golden street of the New Jerusalem—we can walk with Christ in His garden, and echo the words of the bride in the Song of Songs :

"I sat down under His shadow with great delight,
And His fruit was sweet to my taste.
He brought me to the banqueting house,
And His banner over me was love."

We may stay always in the Garden of God, under the shadow of the Tree of Life, rejoicing in the companionship of Him Who is "The Chiefest among ten thousand."

We are not yet in the Holy City, but each one can do something to make his own city or town holy, and so prepare the way for the King's return.

One evening, at a meeting in Scotland, a voice called out :

"Do ye ken how the streets of the New Jerusalem are kept clean?"

"No," said the clergyman who was addressing the meeting.

"Well," went on the voice from the people, "each one aye sweeps before his own door."

That is the way the sidewalks are kept clear of snow in our own Canadian cities, is it not? The City of God can only be holy if the people in it are holy. Though the gates stand always open, yet "there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that

4 IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM

defileth." It is only the pure in heart who can see God.

We have not yet reached the Promised Land, but are journeying towards it, following the guiding pillar of God's providence through the wilderness. As we go forward obediently a miracle is wrought and the words of the prophet are fulfilled :

"The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water no lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast." We can go on our way rejoicing, for our eyes are open to the Vision of God, and we walk beside our Lord in His Garden.

"Did I not see thee in the garden with Him ?" said a man once to a disciple of the King. Is the watching world likely to say such a thing of us ? Are our hearts so full of joy and peace, and our faces so radiant, that those who know us take knowledge of us that we have been with JESUS ?

"JESUS near—all is well ;

Nothing seems difficult

Would not the loss of Him be greater loss

Than if the whole world went from you ?

What, without Him can it give you ?

Apart from Him, life is a grievous hell ;

With Him, a pleasant garden."

The King does not stay far off from His beloved, but has come down into His garden, to the beds of

IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM

5

spices, to gather lilies. He delights in the fragrance of prayer and the beauty of purity. He wants to live with us in everyday fellowship. He is even now beside us, trying to attract our attention. Hour after hour we forget Him, in the rush of work or pleasure ; but sometimes we remember His Presence, and one look up into His face brings instant peace and joy.

"Only Heaven
Is sweeter than to walk with Christ at midnight."

There once lived a man who was often called "The Pair." When he went along the road he always chose the worst path, walking in rough or muddy places and leaving the best road for an unseen Companion. At mealtimes the place at his right hand was set with the best china and silver. The choicest food was placed upon that plate and was afterwards given to the poor. If anyone asked why no person occupied that place of honour, he would answer : "But He is there." When dying, his hand was stretched out from the bed as if clasped in the hand of an unseen Friend, and he talked in low tones during his last illness to One Who was evidently very near.

When Moses was a shepherd in the desert he had a wonderful Vision. It was a far grander experience than anything he had ever known when he was a prince in Egypt. The glowing thorn-

bush revealed to the thoughtful shepherd the Presence of God. The wilderness had been "holy ground" all the time, for God was there, but Moses had walked in careless ignorance, not knowing. We are also, even now, on holy ground, for God is with us. Let us think and speak and act as in His sight.

When Jacob's spiritual sight was quickened, as his body lay unconscious, he discovered that heaven and earth were closely linked together. "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I knew it not," he said. Christ is the Living Ladder, the Way from earth to heaven. Jacob set up a pillar to mark the gate leading into heaven. It is hardly possible for us to do that, for we know that in every place we can climb the Ladder and kneel before the Throne of Light. The whole earth is holy ground, and every place is the gate of heaven.

A short time ago I received a gift which seemed to me especially holy. It was an olive leaf which a friend had gathered for me in the Garden of Gethsemane. As I looked at the little sage-green leaf it carried me back to that sacred garden where the Saviour of the world stooped to lift to His shoulder the awful burden of the Cross. The three favoured disciples were drawn apart from the others, and asked to watch and pray in helpful fellowship with their suffering Master. We know how they disappointed Him. Are we disappointing

IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM

7

Him too? We also are called to kneel beside Him in the garden and pray until we gain strength to endure. We are never compelled to watch alone. Our Elder Brother never fails in sympathy while we are struggling to yield our will to the Will of our Father. He is always kneeling beside us, praying for and with us. We can face the troubles of life more bravely when we know that God is testing our faith in order to strengthen it by exercise, when we remember that the daily endurance of each little commonplace cross will result in a steady increase of spiritual power.

If we kneel beside our Leader in the garden, watching His perfect self-surrender, we can never be satisfied to spend our lives in self-seeking. We long to follow in the train of those who dare to walk in His steps, pouring out their lives in self-forgetting service, and saying bravely when called to kneel beside their Master in Gethsemane—"If this cup of sorrow may not pass away from me, except I drink it, Thy Will be done." Our Elder Brother knows how hard it is sometimes to say trustfully to our Father: "Not what I will, but what Thou wilt." He remembers that His own victory was not easily won. My little olive-leaf carries me swiftly into that moonlit garden, where the Maker of the olive-trees lay on His face beneath the rustling leaves, crushed to earth in agony under the awful burden of a world's sin.

IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM

The Master in a garden dim
Alone the wine-press trod ;
His chosen friends unheeding slept
While angels wond'ring vigil kept
Beside the Son of God.

When I, in dread Gethsemane,
Plead, "Not my will but Thine !"
The Master kneels beside me there
With hands outstretched my cross to share
And eyes with love ashine.

Either the Presence of God in our midst is a glorious Fact, or else there is no truth in Christianity, no revelation in the Bible, no help at all in Christ. There can be no half measures. God cannot be with us sometimes and absent at other times. I have heard people say that a certain thing seemed "almost providential." Of course it was providential. Nothing can happen to us unless God has permitted it and intends it to work for our great and eternal good. Even in the matter of the greatest crime ever committed, the inspired Word of God has declared that Christ was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. Though Gentiles and Israelites were gathered together against Him they could only do "whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done." Knowing this, our Lord could say trustfully that His own Father had given Him the cup of agony to drink.

IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM

9

Our Father is carefully watching over our education. Very dear to Him is our present happiness, but far dearer is our eternal joy, which can only come from holiness. A father loves to see his child enjoy a holiday, but he will not spoil the child's future life by giving him holidays every time he asks for them.

It is not when life is comfortable and easy that men lift their heads exultantly, but when they are fighting victoriously against evil and following Christ, even though Calvary stands in the way to heaven.

Do you want God to offer you a life of luxury and selfish enjoyment? Is that your idea of a successful life? The Greatest Life ever lived on earth began in a stable and ended on a Cross.

If you gave a child a box of candy and he ate it all himself, without offering any to his brothers and sisters, would you think him a person to be admired and copied? Do you want to live that kind of "successful" life, reaching out for all you can get hold of? If not, then you can look up into the Father's face, and thank Him, if He has not given you enough of this world's treasures to dwarf your soul's growth.

God wants His children to develop into strong men and women, therefore He does not clear every trouble and difficulty out of their way. He answers foolish prayers with infinite wisdom.

10 IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM

It is not enough for us to be trained in the King's garden ; we need the Presence of the King to satisfy our longing souls. Any spot on earth is sweet and beautiful to a lover, when the one he loves best meets him there. With our earthly eyes we have never seen the King in His beauty, and yet we can truly say :

"I see Thee not, I hear Thee not,
Yet art Thou oft with me :
And earth hath ne'er so sweet a spot
As where I meet with Thee."

A man once had a garden of which he talked very often, saying that many beautiful thoughts came to him there. One evening a friend was invited to see it, and found that the garden was only a narrow strip between high brick walls.

"Surely this is not the garden you are always talking about," he exclaimed. "It is so small !"

"Yes," said the happy owner, pointing to the stars above, "but see how high it is."

So it is with each of us wherever we may be. From the spot of earth on which we stand we can reach up to the stars, and to Him Who says : "I am . . . the bright and morning Star." Sometimes men have been told that their eyesight has been injured by desk-work, by constantly looking at things that are too near. So we seriously injure our spiritual vision if we keep our attention constantly

fixed on earthly things. If our days are spent in strenuous work, with no remembrance of the unseen Lord beside us, we shall find that our power of seeing the Vision of His Face will be steadily impaired.

Then we want to invite others into the King's Garden. How can we do this unless we ourselves are at home there? Christ can touch other souls through us if we walk with Him often. He is out of sight but very near, and "no one need despair in the palms of whose hands lingers the touch of Jesus Christ." If we live every day consciously with our unseen Lord, if we talk over with Him our pleasures and difficulties, drawing strength from Him to endure troubles cheerily and silently, then others will be more sure that He is really living in the world to-day.

JESUS is the same to-day as He was yesterday. Then He hid His Divine glory under the veil of an apparently commonplace life. Many saw Him in the carpenter's home, working with poor and unsatisfactory tools;—how could they dream that the Maker of the stars was in their midst? The people of Nazareth did not know that their village was holy ground, and would be entered reverently by multitudes of pilgrims from the ends of the earth. Are we as blind? Christ touches us in every sorrow and in every joy. He comes to us in every person we meet. He puts each moment's

duty into our hands, and pours wonderful joy into our hearts when we unreservedly place ourselves with all that He has given us at His disposal.

Once I dreamed that I was kneeling beneath the Cross. I did not dare to lift my head, though I knew that my Lord was hanging there. Without a word being spoken I understood that He was asking me to do something that was hard and unpleasant. In the dream came a sudden rush of joy as I yielded my will to His. The remembrance of that dream still helps me to rejoice in the privilege of "obeying when obedience is hard."

Once upon a time the daughter of a king went to a magician and said : "My lover is far away across the sea. Can you give me a charm which will always hold us together ?" The magician answered : "There is a way ; but there are risks connected with it. You can be so near each other in spirit that every thought of yours will instantly reach him."

"That is exactly what I want," said the princess ; "but where is the risk ?"

The magician replied : "If you are depressed and discouraged you will cloud the happiness of your lover. If you are unkind to anyone, even in your thoughts, the pain you give will hurt him you love. If your faith is weak, his life will suffer."

The princess went away with joy in her heart. She bore all her troubles bravely, because her

courage helped her lover to endure. She thought constantly about things pure and lovely, knowing that such thoughts would steal like the fragrance of unseen violets into the heart of her betrothed. She was quick to seize any chance of doing a kindness, knowing that each act of love would fly straight to her beloved as a gift from her hand to his.

Perhaps the story is not as fanciful as it seems. We don't know the power of one spirit on another. The Psychical Research Society has published many stories of thought-transference. If no one can unsay his words, nor stop them when they go out into the world to help or injure other souls, have we any reason to believe that thoughts are less swift or less mighty?

"Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them?" asked our Lord. We all know the obvious answer to that question, and we also know that He Who has betrothed unto Himself His Bride, the Church, keeps in closest touch with her. "Lo, I am with you always," He says. We cannot see Him, but we know that every thought of ours has power to give Him joy or sorrow.

We can trust the promise of the King: "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." Sweeter than the music of angels' harps, sounding in the City of gold, the last glad message from the Bridegroom to

14 IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM

His loved Bride rings down through the flying centuries : "Surely I come quickly. Amen."

"Even so, come, Lord Jesus !" is our prayer, while we wait in joyous anticipation, keeping alight the fire of love for Him by daily ministry to His brethren.

"In secret love the Master
To each one whispers low,
'I am at hand—work faster,
Behold the sunset glow !'
And each one smileth sweet
Who hears the Master's feet."

CHAPTER II

A LIVING GARDEN

I will be as the dew unto Israel ; he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return ; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine.—Hos. xiv. 5-7.

LIFE is proved by growth. Those who are living branches of the True Vine must be making progress in the spiritual life. Those who, like the rich young ruler, have kept the Commandments from their youth up, want to know their next duty. Perhaps they have only kept the letter of the Commandments, and find—when they say to Christ, "What lack I yet?"—that the next step He demands is too hard for them.

Look about you and see how steadily living things are growing. The trees in the orchard drop their lovely blossoms without fretting over the loss, because they are struggling after better things, are trying to bring the fruit to perfection. Plants send forth their shoots bravely and hopefully, pushing on and up,—first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. Even when they seem to be retrograding the change is really upward still. The seed, which has taken so long

to develop, gives up its life and climbs higher through the sacrifice ; whether it fall into the ground and die—bringing forth much fruit—or is eaten by man, reaching up through his flesh to new heights.

Is it easy for you to stand on the height of Christian attainment that you have reached ? Then you are called to climb higher. To stand still is to fail. A farmer is pleased with the look of his crops when each plant is gathering nourishment from earth and air, from sunshine and rain ; and is building everything within reach into the fibre of its being. God can only be pleased with His Garden when His plants are growing, gaining every day more of the knowledge of Himself, which is Life.

Perhaps your days are already full of unselfish service, and you hardly see any opportunity of doing more work than you are already shouldering. This preaching about the necessity of constant improvement may seem a stern and impossible order. But God may not be saying to you, "Work harder." Perhaps He may be telling you to lay aside some duties of less importance, in order that you may have time and strength to speak to Him and listen to Him. How can you grow in His likeness if you are too busy to look at Him ? The fruit of the Spirit is spiritual, seen only by Him Who looketh upon the heart.—Gal. v. - 22, 23.

A LIVING GARDEN

17

There is plenty of room for growth in the best of lives. Prayers are often careless and hurried. Worldliness, business, pleasure, or the ambition to get ahead of other people—often crowds out even the remembrance of God. When you lie down at night, feeling that you have accomplished a lot of hard work during the day, don't be too self-satisfied about it. Have you grown spiritually? Have you seen the face of God more clearly, walked with Him more joyously and trustfully, been a channel of communication between Him and His other children? If God sees that we are no farther advanced in the spiritual life than we were last year, it will give Him little pleasure to see a fair show of "leaves." He is seeking for fruit, the fruit of "love, joy, peace and faith." We must press nearer to Him, trust Him more perfectly, obey Him more joyously, climbing from strength to strength. We must gather spiritual nourishment from everything; from pleasure and work, from happiness and sorrow, from sunshiny seasons and days of storm.

God is very patient when He sees that souls are bent on progress. Of course He is patient—He is growing the most priceless thing in creation, and all eternity is before us for our development towards perfection. But we can't grow without real effort, and if we are not going forward we are slipping back. To give up effort is to drift with

the stream. If we find it easy to be Christians, we must be more watchful and prayerful ; making the service of God our great business in life. He may not ask us to do a different kind of work, but we can certainly consecrate our everyday work more and more. Then common work will never be commonplace.

Let us never rest satisfied with second-rate service, but try to offer to God golden days, set with shining hours. So many of our gifts are spoiled by selfishness. We try to win the approval of men, we want to be thought unselfish ; and cover an unworthy motive by an appearance of consideration for others. Or we plod wearily through the day's work, just because we know it has to be done, missing the gladness of it—the joy of serving our King. Perhaps we sadly say : "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought !" fearing that our work has been wasted because we cannot see any results ; while all the time God is treasuring every precious, love-inspired bit of service. Both the work and the worker are of great value in His eyes. It is quality rather than quantity of work that He cares most about. A cup of cold water given in His Name may have more love inspiring it than thousands of dollars given without joy or willingness. God does not need our gifts, and He can do His work without our help if He chooses ; but He is watching for outward proofs of life—and love is life.

A LIVING GARDEN

19

How does life develop and grow strong in the world? Not suddenly, by startling effort or tremendous leaps; but slowly, quietly and imperceptibly. The solid, enduring, wood of a tree is built up by the humble, unnoticed work of the tiny, perishable leaves and the hidden, unnoticed roots. Little by little a helpless baby develops into a strong man. Every breath drawn into his lungs, every step he takes, every crumb he eats adds its mite to the grand total. He can only grow by little things, he can only assimilate food—bodily, mental or spiritual—in small quantities. Therefore God, in wise and tender love, gives the routine duties of every day; so that the soul may grow as they are cheerfully and faithfully performed. Don't fancy that your life is uneventful, just because you have the same tasks pressing on you that were filling up your time last week and last year. The food and sleep and exercise that a growing child builds into himself may be much the same in kind to-day as yesterday; but he has grown a little by their means, and daily growing is a glorious thing. As the body grows strong by assimilating food, air and sunshine, so the soul grows by drinking in more and more of the Life of God, if the daily duties are done in a consecrated spirit.

When a crisis comes a man stands revealed as a hero or a coward—made so, not suddenly but by years of secret growth. A tree which can endure

the shock of a storm has gathered its strength by the steady work of plodding roots and weak leaves, accepting the opportunities of extracting life from very ordinary surroundings. The people who cheerfully accept the duties and opportunities within reach, growing steadily by unnoticed victories over pride and selfishness and ill-temper, are getting into good condition spiritually and will be strong under any sudden strain. It is a mistake to think that pain and sorrow are God's only gifts of grace to an aspiring soul. Days and years of peace and happiness are given to draw us upward, as the sunshine draws up living plants, while the soft rain and dew refresh them. God speaks to us in the pleasant wind, in the green grass and the lovely sky, in the songs of birds and the dear love of friends. Shall we take the love-tokens from His hand without a look into His Face or a word of thanks? Are we too busy to even take time to enjoy beautiful sights and sounds which are offered without charge?

Those who are strenuously trying to use this world and its opportunities, sometimes forget the value of their own souls. It is profitless to gain the world and lose one's self. A man who works up from poverty to wealth, and feels that he has made a success of life, may have really wasted his opportunities. The vital question is not, "What money has he secured?" but "What riches of character are his?" When Death sweeps away the property

A LIVING GARDEN

21

he has accumulated, will he be revealed in a starving, unclothed condition?

"A beggar with a million bits of gold."

Let us look into this matter; for we don't want to invest all our capital of time, strength and money in a bank which may break any day, and which will certainly break when death calls us away. We are given time to spend—how many years God only knows. Are we really trying to grow each day more like the Perfect Man? Do we study His Life, talk often with Him, go out of our way to do little acts of kindness, for love's sake?

We are apt to think that any time will do for spiritual things, that we can safely devote all our best years to earthly pursuits and put aside religion to a more convenient season, sure that God will be ready to welcome and forgive us when we grow tired of other things and think it wise to prepare for heaven. The prophet Amos speaks of a great famine—not a famine of bread nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the Word of the Lord. He says that hungry souls shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the Word of the Lord, "and shall not find it."

Let us seek God before we grow hardened, before we become absorbed in earthly cares or pursuits, before our spiritual senses become so weak that they

are unable to make us conscious of the Presence of our Lord.

If we are alive and growing we are making progress and need not be disheartened by many falls. A child may be working conscientiously at a difficult piece of music, and yet stumble over the notes in a painful manner. He cannot see that he plays it any better than yesterday ; but, if he keeps on trying, it will become easier by slow degrees, until at length he can play it without conscious effort. Let us not sit down in despair to lament over our sins, but get up and try again. Those who are trying to serve God, prayerfully and continuously, must be making headway. The level of Christian living which is beyond us to-day—which we hopelessly admire in others—may be easily ours ten years from now ; if we each day strive prayerfully to be better in thought, word and act than we were yesterday. Many failures need not discourage us—failure is at least a proof of effort. You may feel yourself a failure as a Sunday-school teacher ; but, if you keep on trying, you will leave behind the critics who find fault with Sunday School methods and never lift a finger to remedy them.

A man who won great renown on the stage for his marvellous quickness in changing from one costume to another, did it in this simple but painstaking fashion. One of his changes was from full evening dress to the dress of an old woman. At

first, with the help of two assistants, he could not make the change in less than eight minutes. He worked at this particular change of costume several times a day for eight years, with the same assistants ; and at the end of that time he could do it in a few seconds. Some of his changes are so astonishingly rapid that people who see him go off the stage in one costume and return in less than a quarter of a minute in a different one, will not believe that it is the same man. Yet his method is simple ; it is only enthusiastic and untiring practice. "Practice makes perfect" in Christianity as well as in other things.

Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be satisfied, those who delight in the Lord shall receive from Him their heart's desire,—but it must continue to be their heart's desire. To desire goodness only by fits and starts, will be to slip back weakly after a little progress has been made. Steady effort is necessary for steady growth.

A man who had failed in something he desired to accomplish was once walking purposelessly along the street, ready to give up the struggle in despair. A bit of crumpled paper attracted his attention and he stooped to pick it up. On it were these words : "If you are tempted to turn back, go on, sir, go on." It seemed like a personal message and he acted on it, with Hope as his counsellor instead of Despair. He was not really beaten—people never are—he only thought himself beaten.

In a living garden the plants are not all alike, even when they all receive the same care. A person once said : "I am afraid there is something wrong with my spiritual condition, for I can't feel like some Christians do. I don't enjoy sitting quietly for hours studying my Bible, but I do love to show my love for Christ by helping His children." Let such a person take care of a garden for a few months. When the spring weather awakens the life that was sleeping in various seeds, it would be very disappointing if there was a monotonous sameness in all the plants. Are you sorry because the roses and lilies are not exactly alike ? Each plant draws its own individual qualities from the earth, the sunshine and the rain ; and the gardener is far more pleased with the variety than if all his plants aimed at a dull uniformity.

Are you an enthusiastic gardener ? Do you rush out after a warm spring shower to see how each tiny leaf and shoot has benefited by it ? Do you love and care for your plants individually, giving to each one the special attention that will encourage and help it best ? Then rejoice in the remembrance that the Divine Husbandman is giving special attention to you, every moment of every day ; giving you all the culture your nature demands, and drawing you up from earthly surroundings by the sunshine of His love. Each plant in His Garden has the whole power of God at its

A LIVING GARDEN

25

service, even as the mighty sun gives light to each tiny blade of grass on the earth, which would wither and die without it as certainly as the greatest forest tree.

As the sun awakes into beauty and fruitfulness the life of the seed, so the Sun of Righteousness shines upon His Garden and it blossoms as the rose.

"Inmost heaven its radiance pours
Round thy windows, at thy doors,
Asking but to be let in,
Waiting to flood out thy sin,
Offering thee unfailing health,
Love's refreshment, boundless wealth."

CHAPTER III

WATERED AND KEPT

The Lord shall satisfy thy soul in drought and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.—ISA. lviii. 11.

I the LORD do keep it ; I will water it every moment : lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.—ISA. xxvii. 3.

COULD any words describe more beautifully God's watchful care of each soul He loves than this description of a watered garden, which is kept night and day by the LORD Himself and watered *every moment*? Think what such care would mean in a hot country where long droughts are common! God's Garden is not dependent on the rain, which falls irregularly ; but has its own spring of Living Water, whose waters fail not. The water may be directed towards the roots of the thirsty plants, along channels cut in the earth, or the Gardener may Himself carry it where it is especially needed.

In these days, when "Nature's Laws" are spoken of as though we were in the grasp of a heartless machine—careless of individuals but careful of the species—it is cheering to remember that God respects the individuality of each of His creatures. When a sparrow falls to the ground the

Father is there. What more could any little bird want than the tender care of the Great Father of all? Not a wild flower on the roadside nor a blade of grass in a field can put on its beautiful robes without His help. The young lions are not strong enough to provide for themselves and not one little bird is forgotten. We and they must seek our meat from God, as the disciples went to Christ for the bread which He brake.

In the Bible—that great Book which has been a law to nations and kings for thousands of years—men are commanded to respect the rights of God's helpless creatures. In Deut. xxii. we are told that if anyone finds a bird's nest in a tree or on the ground, and the mother bird refuses to leave her eggs or her young, she must not be captured. The mother-love is very dear to God, and men are to honour it wherever it is found. Another command which is repeated over and over again is: "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk." We may think that it cannot matter to the mother, if she is dead. But is she dead? God is love, and all love is His Life. Can God's Life die?

If our Father cares for birds, beasts and flowers, how tender must be His watchful care over His human children, who are—Christ Himself has declared—of more value than many sparrows. The Church is not like a great wheat-field in our Canadian North-West, where every grain seems exactly

28 IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM

like a million others, and all are watered, gathered and threshed in a mass. No, we are planted in a "garden inclosed," pruned, watered and "gathered one by one."—Isa. xxvii. 12—because we are choice plants and highly prized by the Divine Husbandman.

"He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of His eye," said the prophet Zechariah. How swiftly the eye is protected when anything threatens it. Like lightning its appeal for help is flashed to the brain, and instantly the eyelid receives and obeys the order to drop like a shield over the endangered eye. If a grain of dust settles on the eyeball it is instantly washed off by the cleansing water which is constantly flowing over it. So Christ, Who is our Head, feels instantly anything that touches us, and is always ready to cleanse and purify the weakest of His members. Nothing that concerns us can be too small to win His attention Who has said: "the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

God neither expects nor wishes all the plants in His garden to be exactly alike. Perhaps you are one of the King's lilies, and He "greatly desires thy beauty"—the beauty of purity. Or you may be like a tree, planted by the rivers of water so that you may bring forth fruit in due season.

Perhaps you feel that your life is very unimportant and commonplace, just like thousands of

other lives. But think how barren the earth would be without the fields of grass and grain. We should soon grow weary of the flowers if they had no background of restful green, and there would be no food for men or animals. Happily for the world there is always "much grass" in God's Garden. Many humble-minded *great* people cheerfully do the work which seems commonplace and uninteresting. Like the grass, millions of quiet lives are everywhere beautifying and purifying the world. "Those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour."

In the Garden of the Lord every blade of grass may reach out and touch the hem of the Master's garment as He passes through, and each touch of faith thrills instantly to His heart. He is never so occupied with great matters as to be too busy to give His whole attention to you or to me.

"Yes, leave it with Him,
The lilies all do,
And they grow ;
They grow in the rain,
And they grow in the dew,
Yes, they grow.
They grow in the darkness
All hid in the night,
They grow in the sunshine
Revealed by the light,
Still they grow."

30 IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM

Like the lilies we want to grow. It would be terrible to stand still. It is foolish, therefore, to lose confidence in God when troubles come into our lives. The Divine Gardener is wise in His love. His plants must be perfected by sterner gifts than pleasant sunshine and refreshing dew. He does not hesitate to use the pruning knife whenever it is needed, and He often cuts very deeply though always tenderly. Surely we can trust the Hands which bear the marks of redying love. But Trust is not a spiritual anæsthetic, deadening sensation. If even the Captain of our salvation was perfected by suffering, how can we be perfected in an easier way ?

Then storms come sometimes. The prophet Joel shows how God's judgments sweep through His garden, destroying the bark of the fig tree, withering the pomegranate, the palm and the apple tree. He says : "The seed is rotten under their clods, the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down : for the corn is withered." But even in the worst storm we may safely put our whole trust in God's everlasting love. The prophet explains that when the storm has done its work the land will rejoice again, the floors shall be full of wheat, and the years destroyed by locust and caterpillar shall be "restored."

In some storms, as in the awful one which swept over our Lord on the Cross, the soul seems forsaken by God as well as man ; and can only cling des-

WATERED AND KEPT

31

perately to Him Whose face is hidden, refusing to let Him go. The Father is always holding us closely, even when we cannot see His face. The eternal God is our Refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. Though the enemy may come in like a flood, yet "many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." Even in the darkest hour we are safe, for He Who is Almighty has said : "I have loved thee with an everlasting love : therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee. Again I will build thee their souls shall be as a watered garden ; and they shall not sorrow any more at all." We are safe in our Father's world as a child in its cradle.

"Like a cradle rocking, rocking,
Silent, peaceful, to and fro,
Like a mother's sweet looks dropping
On the little face below,
Hangs the green earth, swinging, turning,
Jarless, noiseless, safe, and slow :
Falls the light of God's face bending
Down and watching us below.

"And as feeble babes that suffer,
Toss and cry, and will not rest,
Are the ones the tender mother
Holds the closest, loves the best :
So, when we are weak and wretched,
By our sins weighed down, distressed,
Then it is that God's great patience
Holds us closest, loves us best."

CHAPTER IV.

SEEKING THE MASTER

"Whither is thy Beloved gone,
O thou fairest among women?
Whither hath thy Beloved turned Him,
That we may seek Him with thee."
Cant. vi. 1. (R. V.)

WHEN Adam and Eve heard the Voice of the LORD in the garden, in the quiet evening hour, they tried to hide themselves. They were afraid of that Holy Presence, afraid of the Physician who alone had power to heal their sin-sick souls. The Voice of God, His Living Word, has come down to walk with us on the earth. Do we also hide from Him, do we try to drown the music of His voice in the noisy rush of business or pleasure? Each Sunday the Bridegroom pleads for a quiet time alone with His Bride. Does He always succeed in winning the full attention even of the most enthusiastic members of the Church? Like Martha, they may be so busy working for Him that His invitation to sit at His feet, in wonderful fellowship, is unheeded. "Where two or three are gathered together in My Name," He says, "there am I in the midst of them." As the Israelites in the wilderness had a "Tent of Meeting," a place where they were invited to meet with God, so it is

with the Church to-day. The Infinite God faithfully keeps His appointment ; but too often finds that the creatures He has made are too busy or too idle to seek Him. There are plenty of Christians within easy distance of the churches, and yet the seats are apt to be half empty unless some unusual attraction has been advertised.

Just think of it ! People come in crowds to hear a popular preacher, and yet stay away when invited to meet God ! Many inducements are held out to attract men to the churches. Music, decorations, eloquent speakers are advertised to induce the fickle multitude to attend Divine service. Any one from a heathen country might naturally suppose that Christians did not go to church to worship God, but only to be entertained. And when we do accept the invitation to meet our Lord, sometimes we are only half there. It is a mockery to bring the body to church and allow the soul—the part of us which can aspire to fellowship with the Divine—to wander far away.

A little girl was once asked what she remembered of the sermon which her outward ears had heard that morning. She serenely answered, "I don't remember anything, for I didn't listen. I never do." And yet the preacher had been sent with a message from the King, who had said : "He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth Me ; and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me." How

34 IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM

often we are guilty of disrespect to the ambassador of the King, although He has warned us so strongly against it.

The LORD is in His holy temple and we stand, like Moses, on holy ground ; but does the earth keep silence—a reverent, listening silence—before Him ? Crowds are drawn to this temple or that, by various attractions : eager to see or be seen. They are not seeking and do not find the King. It is not surprising that they should come away with the bored feeling that a wearisome duty has been performed, instead of with the trembling gladness of a soul that has been face to face with God.

Of course there are many who do not profess to attend Divine service in any church, but there is something wrong with us when we form the habit of kneeling before God while our hearts are far away. If the Bride of Christ cares so little about meeting her Lord, the outside world will not care to know Him, will not ask :

"Whither is thy Beloved gone that we may seek Him with thee ?"

It is a truism that our hearts can never be satisfied with earthly and temporal happiness. We have felt the marvellous joy of drawing near to God. We are ashamed of the mockery that our church-going sometimes is, ashamed of the inattentive words of prayer and praise which we have dared to offer to the Most High. Let us fight resolutely

against the habit of wandering thoughts. Our careless lip-service may be changed into real prayer by the realization of God's Presence. Two or three are gathered together in the Name of Christ, therefore He is most certainly in the midst of the congregation. If we could see His glory we might be like St. John, who fell at His feet as dead ; but the certainty of His Presence should bring joy to us who love Him. "Fear not," He says, "for I am with thee ;" and again, "It is I, be not afraid."

Let us seek the Master joyously when He invites us into His garden. Let us lift up our hearts as well as our eyes to His face, thanking and praising Him in real earnest, listening to His messages and asking help and advice in our difficulties. It is a high honour to have an appointment with the King of kings. How strange it is that anyone can feel ashamed of being found upon his knees !

There is a story often told of General Gordon's open and fearless loyalty to his God. For half an hour every morning a handkerchief was spread on the ground in front of his tent. This was a warning to the whole camp that their general was having an interview with his Divine Commander and must not be interrupted. No man—white or black—Christian or heathen—dared enter the tent while that token was displayed outside.

Many times each day we can slip swiftly through the open gate into the garden of peace, and seek the

Master there. No matter how busy we are, "the upward glancing of an eye when none but God is near" lifts us into the sacred enclosure, the "garden inclosed." No one can bar the door when the Master Himself has invited us to meet Him—when He is "The Door." Worldly anxieties are shut outside and we kneel care-free at the feet of our Lord. Without Him we can do nothing. We cannot live on yesterday's prayer any more than we can live on the breath our lungs inhaled yesterday. One who lives with God constantly can be used by God to do the work He wants doing—and that is the only work worth while. The secret thoughts should mount heavenward whenever the pressure of outward things will permit—for instance, when one has to wait for a train or an appointment.

One day I called on a woman who had been told shortly before that she would not live six months. She was eagerly watching for the summons to meet her Lord, and told me that the people around her seemed unreal in comparison with His felt Presence. That is an unusual case, but there is no reason why perfectly healthy people should fail to find the Presence of God the most real fact in their every-day life. Let us be real before Him, putting away all unsatisfying make-believe. Either God is ready to welcome us or there is no truth in our religion at all. If He has invited us to meet Him and is waiting to receive us, if He has strength

to offer for our daily work, and joy to carry us victoriously through vexations and sorrows, then it is not a question of whether we can always feel His Presence. If we seek His help, and He is close at hand, then we receive exactly what we need. If we could always feel the change in our conditions wrought by prayer, faith would scarcely have any practice, and we should lose the many opportunities now offered of strengthening it by trusting when we do not feel, of believing when we do not understand.

We are creatures of habit, and can form the habit of depending on earthly company for our happiness, or the habit of going often into the secret sanctuary where God offers satisfying fellowship. It is necessary to take time, or make time, for the high privilege of communion with God. Everybody seems to be in a hurry in these strenuous days. I am often reminded of the wild rush in "Alice Behind the Looking Glass." The Queen dragged her on at a tremendous pace, crying "Faster! Faster!" When at last they halted Alice asked if they had got somewhere, but was told that the pace must be kept up in order to keep in the same place. They were still under the same tree, had not made any progress at all. It is folly to live always in a rush and yet make no progress in real things, the things which will last. Why should we always choose the fastest train, in order to

38 IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM

"waste no time?" What is waste of time? What object are we struggling after? Let us find out what these years of earthly life are intended to accomplish. If they are given us to be crowded to the brim with active work, then let us live in a rush and do as much as we possibly can. If they are given us as an opportunity of knowing God, and growing each day more like the Perfect Example set us in the earthly Life of our Master, then we are certainly wasting time when we deliberately choose to live in such a rush of active work that we have no time to spare for communion with our LORD. Even JESUS, the only Holy Son of Man, drew power for His daily work by being often alone with His Father. In the one-roomed cottage home there was little chance of privacy, and He found the Garden of Peace among the hills round Nazareth or in the lonely wilderness. Did you ever gaze up at night to the solemn stars and find out that God was very near?

Let us be real before the Great Searcher of hearts. No affectation or insincerity should be allowed to spoil our communion with Him. If we could see Him and hear His voice, when He invited us to have a quiet, restful time alone with Him, then we should feel that other engagements were very unimportant as compared with this one. Is it not just as real and just as important when we can only see Him with the eye of faith and hear His voice in our hearts?

The Bridegroom comes to meet His Bride with His hands full of gifts. His people ask for happiness and He gives joy—joy which can light up the darkest path. They plead for success, and He gives eternal success—perfected character. But it is not of the gifts so much as the Giver we are thinking when we enter the Holy of Holies and shut out the world. It is not the help we shall gain from that secret hidden life with God which is of most value in our eyes. Does a woman rejoice in the opportunity of meeting her dearest friend because he always brings her a gift? If so, then she is not giving or receiving satisfying love. Christ is asking for our love, will He be satisfied with our petitions and thanksgivings? If He always allowed us to see the gifts we gain from communion with Him, then we might become absorbed in the gifts and forget the Giver.

We can give joy to our Lord by resting trustfully on His Will when He is apparently doing nothing to help us. Let us be glad of the chance to prove our trust, when He makes no sign of answering our prayers.

The time when we can approach nearest to our King is when we obey His call to eat of the Feast which He has prepared. There we not only draw near to Him but we are made one with Him. Shall we dare to doubt His own promise: "He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him," just because we sometimes

do not *feel* Him near when we kneel at His feet and take the cup from His hands ? He is near, and our feeling or not feeling does not alter in the least the fact of His wondrous Presence. We can go back to our work, strong in the certainty that Christ's Life is within us. We can lean back on our Master's heart, like St. John the beloved, sure of Him and His unfailing love ; even though the agony in the garden may be facing us. The King understands why suffering must be endured, so there is no need for us to fully understand the mystery of pain. Our future is safe in His hands. We can wait and trust through the darkness of Good Friday until the Easter sunshine makes everything plain, and death is conquered by life. We can wait and trust, if we spend much of our time consciously leaning on our God. Trusting Him every day in little things, we shall be able to trust Him also in times of hard testing.

This is a practical matter. Are we making the most of the present opportunity ? If it is really impossible to find leisure for prayer, the work of the day can be laid, bit by bit, at the Master's feet. Then the spirit of prayer will transfigure it, making it beautiful and splendid. Work itself will be transformed into prayer, so the busiest days may be sweetened and glorified by the remembrance of the King's Presence. He is here now.

"Nor time nor fate nor space can bar us from His face,
Or stand between one soul and His exhaustless grace."

CHAPTER V.

IN HIS GARDEN OF LILIES.

My Beloved is gone down to His garden, to the beds of spices,
To feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies.

I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine :

He feedeth His flock among the lilies.—CANT. vi. 2, 3.

THE King seeks beauty in His garden, beauty and fragrance. He leads His flock to feed among the lilies, knowing what it means to a soul to have pure food. A man once said that he had in His boyhood read a debasing pamphlet, and the evil thoughts which resulted from that deliberate soiling of his soul haunted him all his life. There is a great deal of pure literature in the world, provided for our food ; and there is a vast mass of matter published which is either poisonous or unhealthy. The condition of our souls depends very largely on the food we take. Those who read books of a low, moral tone, or choose friends who care nothing about God, need not be surprised if they make no progress in spiritual things. We are careful not to assimilate poison with our physical digestion, let us be still more careful in avoiding impure spiritual and mental food. To cherish one evil thought deliberately is to inject poison into the heart. Only God knows the deadly mischief it may do.

Those who read and think as much as possible about things that are pure, lovely and of good report, not only live among the lilies but are themselves like "lilies of the Lord." The Master of the Garden is made glad by the beauty of their joyous purity. They mount from strength to strength, with eyes and hearts on the vision of Divine Loveliness, and with hands stretched out to help their weaker comrades. But such an ideal can never be attained suddenly. There must be steady advance, day after day and year after year. Every time we give way to "little" sins of pride, ill-temper, selfishness, covetousness or distrust, we hinder the great work of our perfecting. Christ sits "as a refiner and purifier of silver," watching hopefully to see His image appear ever more and more clearly in our lives. Let us accept from Him as a sacred trust the opportunity given to us of growing daily in spiritual beauty. A bride adorns herself with her ornaments because her beauty will give pleasure to her husband; and the Bride of Christ—His loved Church—knows that she can only give joy to her Lord by putting on "the incorruptible apparel of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."

Two students were once walking down a city street and noticed a suit of clothes hanging in a shop window. On it was this placard: "Slightly Soiled: Greatly Reduced in Price." One of the

young men remarked : "What a splendid text for a sermon to young people ! It is so easy to get slightly soiled—just reading a coarse book, just seeing a vulgar play, just indulging a debasing thought—and lo ! when the time of appraisement arrives, the sad statement is made : 'Greatly reduced in price.' The charm, the strength, the purity of youth has vanished."

When the Master bent before a disciple, to wash his dust-stained feet, the exclamation of reverent humility was very natural : "Thou shalt never wash my feet !" but the quick revulsion of feeling was also very natural, when our Lord explained the meaning of His action.

"If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me," He said ; and St. Peter quickly answered : "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head."

When we look back, at the close of the day, and see how the soiling touch of sin has left many stains on our souls, we thank God for the great mystery of "the forgiveness of sins" as we come to our Master for cleansing. We cannot lie down in peace until we are white and spotless. No power of our own can wash away a single stain, and we should be ready to despair but for the One Fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness.

While we thankfully accept the offered forgiveness—the cleansing which takes away the guilt of sin, though it does not do away with the necessity

44 IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM

of enduring its consequences here in this world—let us be careful that we do not deliberately and willingly contract the slightest stain.

God is always working miracles. The old earth is made over new every spring, the day is bright and new every morning, and we also can be made over new every day. We can come to the fountain of Life and begin all over again, looking up to God and gaining strength from Him, leaving the forgiven past in His tender keeping. He can make even its sins—if honestly repented of and forsaken—to be stepping-stones for our climbing feet. God can make all things new :

"New day, new hope, new courage ! Let this be,
O soul, thy cheerful creed ! What's yesterday
With all its shards, and wrack, and grief, to thee ?
Forget it then—here lies the victor's way."

A new life begins to-day. Shall we submit to be "greatly reduced in price," lowered in value by indulgence in sins which we dare to call "trifling ?" From apparently trifling sins of omission or commission terrible results may proceed. The world is beginning to find that in order to stem an evil satisfactorily it is necessary to take it in time. It is folly to encourage the growth of criminals and then try to reform them ; so great attention is now being paid to the general good of children. Even from such a small matter as the neglect of the teeth, we

are told, spring such serious results as "hunch-back, club-foot, knock-knees," and other defects. One doctor has declared that the dental end of a nerve can manifest itself in the eye, or the ear, causing temporary blindness or deafness. It is no wonder that "toothbrush drill" has been established as a daily part of the work in some schools.

The soul, like the body, cannot afford to trifle with apparently trivial diseases. Neglect of the habit of daily prayer may seem a small matter ; yet it may result in loss of power to see God's face or hear His voice. To be blind and deaf in soul is not a trifling matter.

While engaged in Settlement work, I was talking one Saturday evening to a class of girls, when one of them asked me a question about "love." The others began to giggle, as though that subject were a great joke ; but they soon found that I looked upon it differently. If there is anything unlovely it is to see girls noisy and familiar in their words and behaviour when they are with young men. Nothing can be more beautiful than a young girl who is quiet and modest, not playing with the mysterious fire of love, but keeping her heart, as a temple of radiant purity, a place where God loves to dwell. I found that when the boys and girls in the Settlement indulged in that debasing amusement which is lightly spoken of as "flirting," most of the blame rightfully belonged to the girls. If they were quiet

and modest in manner, the boys seldom ventured on any undue familiarities. If they giggled and talked loudly, or were rough and rude, the young men would follow suit.

A great responsibility rests on the women of the world, for there is considerable truth in the assertion that "men are what the women make them." When a woman recklessly tosses to the winds her inner beauty of spirit—the modesty and purity of thought and word that is her birthright—she helps to drag down the young men who are associating constantly with her.

A young man's ideal of womanhood should be a high one. If he sees in women the beauty that is dear to God, if he dare not in their presence use a coarse or irreverent expression, then he will be inspired to be worthy of womanly friendship, and in trying to climb will inspire the women to climb with him.

The King's daughter must be glorious "within" if she is to be like a lily of purity. It is useless to talk in a lofty strain, in the attempt to influence other lives for good, if the thoughts are beneath the level of the words ; for thoughts always make their presence known. Treasure your white beauty of soul, keep the innocence of childhood unstained, and let it blossom out in the richer beauty of tested purity. Let the light of God's Beauty pour down always on your upturned face, until His glory is

seen shining in your eyes, in the reflected brightness of holiness.

Remember that your stainless beauty of soul is very dear to the King. He wants to be able to go down into His earth-garden and gather lilies. Can you bear to disappoint Him? If His eyes—eyes that look with searching love into your heart—can find no beauty there, do not shrink away from those eyes which are like a flame of fire to burn away all impurity. Press near and nearer to Him and ask with intensest earnestness for pardon and strength, driving out any thoughts which are ashamed to be seen by Him. Beauty that has been lost may be regained. If you have recklessly sacrificed your greatest treasure—the white purity of your soul—do not give way to hopelessness. When the prodigal was pressed close to his father's heart the forgiveness was not partial, but complete. He was restored to the position of an honoured son in his father's house, he was dressed in the best robe, and given a ring in token of a return to favour. If penitence be real and deep, the new beauty which God bestows in the place of the old, has a glory which is all its own.

But let no one think he can sacrifice innocence without lifelong regret. There is a radiant gladness belonging to one who has stepped out of a beautiful childhood into a stainless manhood or womanhood, which one who has thrown away his birthright vainly longs to regain.

Beauty of soul is the birthright of both men and women, a treasure of great price to the world. Some men, who would feel very injured and indignant if the women they love should allow the pearl of their shining purity to be dimmed by a shadow of evil, yet dare to offer those women hands and hearts far from clean. Is it the fault of the women, I wonder, that men are able to satisfy them with a very low standard of holiness?

Men shrink from associating on equal terms with a woman who is not lovely in her life—and women, on the whole, make an earnest attempt to rise to the standard expected of them. If women expected and demanded high ideals and stainless lives in men, and if they refused friendship to any man whose evil influence and life made his touch a defilement, the men would be helped to stand firm in the strength and beauty of untarnished manhood.

The friendship which has begun here should be holy enough to live on in heaven, and real friends will always help each other to climb. A beautiful soul is an inspiration and strength to the world. It is well for us all that among us move many pure-souled Sir Galahads, wearing their white armour unspotted with wilful sin.

We all desire to become like Christ, to be clothed in the beautiful robe of purity. One way of becoming like another person is to be with him as much as

possible. Slowly but surely the weaker nature catches inspiration from the stronger. The high ideal of a leader becomes the ideal of his followers. If this life be a trysting-place with Christ, it will not be a desert but a garden of spices, where roses and lilies will rejoice to blossom. Then the holiness and power of the Master will strengthen and purify the soul that gazes ever into His eyes, keeping always close at His side. Then the character of the disciple will be more and more transformed into the likeness of the Master.

In order to grow in holiness and strength, it is necessary to meet God regularly and often. The attempt to live a Christian life without daily communion with God in prayer, is as foolish as to expect to keep the body strong and well without food and fresh air. And yet a practically prayerless life is only too common, even among those who are trying to follow Christ. Don't we all find that prayer is often a mere formality, hurried through as a duty, and forgotten almost immediately in the day's rush? There is no need to wrong ourselves and dishonour our Lord's invitation to meet Him, in this way. Want of time is not the real reason. We can find time for things we want to do and for things which we consider to be of greater importance. If you love anyone, and only get a chance for a hand-clasp, a smile, or a bright "Good morning, dear!" the sweetness of that brief contact

50 IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM

has power to brighten the whole day. Love is strengthened by fellowship and dies of neglect. When lovers are parted, if they seldom meet in spirit, or neglect opportunities of sending messages to each other, they are very apt to drift apart. If we are careless about meeting with Christ, or hurry through the daily talk with Him because we are "cumbered about much serving," then we are starving our spiritual life. Little wonder if it grows poor and weak.

The King delights in the work of making a beautiful garden wherever the soil of a heart is placed at His disposal.

"Since He makes His garden of thy clod,
Water thy lily, rose, or violet,
And offer up thy sweetness unto God."

The life that is fragrant to God will be fragrant to men too. If you find that your relations don't appreciate you as much as strangers do, never blame the relations. Probably you are keeping the best flowers in your garden to make the house beautiful for visitors. Many plants blossom better when the flowers are gathered every day ; and certainly Love, Joy, Unselfishness and Courtesy improve by daily use.

Open your eyes and you will see many chances of keeping the home bright and sweet with flowers. One plant worth cultivating is the art of apprecia-

tion. The quiet, patient workers who do the cooking and cleaning, are wonderfully cheered when somebody notices their work and praises it. Another very beautiful flower is Joy. We are told to rejoice in the Lord always—that means when we are doing the ordinary daily work. There is nothing that can sweeten the home more than joy. There is nothing more depressing and unbeautiful than a doleful face and complaining tone. Another flower worth cultivating is described by St. Paul in four words: "Not slothful in business." We hear too often that Christians are not businesslike. Being so much occupied in spiritual matters they may grow careless about the business which God has given them to attend to in this world. They forget that they are making the Garden of their Lord unbeautiful and disorderly when they are careless about paying their debts, returning borrowed articles promptly and in good condition, answering important letters without delay, being in time for engagements, etc. Another flower that the Master cares about is neatness in dress. There is a great deal in the Bible about the wearing of white robes. Those who form the habit of being untidy or dirty in dress, and slovenly in the care of their bodies, evidently think that there is no need of looking like fair lilies here. Will they feel at home in the white robes of heaven?

The Master has come down into His earth-garden seeking flowers. How many He finds as

52 IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM

He stoops down to look in places men pass over. Here is a battle against commonplace irritability, fought out in silence and secrecy. The world only sees a bright smile or hears a kind word, but the Master has rejoiced in the victory over self-pity. There is a small coin—a coin hard to spare by the giver—slipped secretly into God's hand through one of His needy children. He sees beauty in quiet endurance of pain or sorrow, in patience under injustice, or the cheery doing of common work.

White lilies are the pure and lovely thoughts which breathe out their sweetness day after day : but there are many other flowers very dear to the Lord of the Garden.

"Heartsease is mothers' tenderness that lightens every pain;
Sweet peas are happy fancies, bright as sunshine in the rain;
And dainty perfumed violets fill all the air with praise
Of countless little kindly deeds that fill the long, dull days.
The bordering forget-me-nots—they spread around each
part—
Are thoughts of friends, and gladden all the garden of the
heart."

CHAPTER VI

SPRINGTIME IN THE GARDEN

My beloved spake, and said unto me, rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone ; the flowers appear on the earth ; the time of the singing of birds is come.—CANT : 10-12.

IT is more than a happy coincidence that Easter should always be in the spring. I am sure God intended that trees and flowers should join in the great Easter anthem, witnessing to the ever-present reality of the Resurrection by rising in newness of life from their long winter sleep.

Easter could never have been so glorious if it had not been for the darkness of Good Friday. If you are a discouraged disciple, who has sought without finding and called but heard no answer, then take courage. Mary wept and could not see the Easter sunshine, because she thought her Lord was dead—yet He was living and close beside her. When He tried to reveal Himself to her she could not at first see His face clearly, because the tears of despair had clouded her vision.

It is Easter, always Easter now. The winter is past. Beside us stands our Living Master. He is calling us by name, calling us to welcome Him in a garden of joy. Shall we, like Mary, turn our faces

towards a dreary tomb? Are we heedless of His Presence, mistaking the Lord of Life for a common gardener?

It is springtime in this garden of earth, and we are called to help in the work of making it blossom as a rose, called to work under the Master of the garden. He is ready to work with and through each consecrated labourer in the vineyard. The nations of the earth are waking up and reaching out towards the Sun of Righteousness. There is seed to be sown, and the soil is prepared. The labourers are no longer few, but the field is large and there is work enough for thousands more.

When a farmer goes out to sow his seed he is expecting miraculous help. He wants grain and vegetables, things which have no existence as yet. Only God can give the expected increase, but the farmer is a fellow-worker with Infinite Power. The seed is trustfully committed to earth, and then the mighty sun, the wind and rain and air do their appointed part. God is Himself ceaselessly working through all.

It is the same in spiritual things. We may plant and water, but only God can give the increase. Why should we become uplifted with apparent success or discouraged with apparent failure? We have no power to work miracles in the physical or spiritual fields. We can no more make saints than apples. Why should we become discouraged, feel-

ing that work we have done prayerfully for Christ is accomplishing nothing, or that we are not growing any better, ourselves, in spite of all our efforts? Our Lord sent out a few men to make disciples of all nations, and inspired them with hope of success by saying: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Why need we feel discouraged if God is working in us and through us, giving the increase when we faithfully and patiently do our part?

One day I was face to face with an untried problem, and just at the right moment all difficulties were suddenly swept aside. I called up a friend by telephone and told her how wonderfully the help I needed had come to me from a totally unexpected quarter. She said, very reasonably, "Surely you were not surprised, were you?" Why should I have been surprised? God always keeps His promise: "Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass." If you are passing through a period of dreariness, remember how bare and lifeless the trees look in the winter. Nothing but a miracle could restore their beauty. But God is always working miracles and we know from long experience how marvellously the bare branches in the orchard can be clothed with baby pink-and-white blossoms in nests of tender green. What God does each spring in the outside world He delights to do also for the deeper

56 IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM

joy of His children. When the winter has done its work of deepening and strengthening life, the sunshine always comes again. We don't know all that is gained from the winter, but it is probably as valuable as our night's sleep. We lie down weary and aching. For a while God takes away from us many of His good gifts. We lose the power of hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting and speaking consciously, and lie helplessly, unable to defend ourselves from any danger. Secretly and quietly the miracle of restoration is worked. The tired nerves and muscles are mysteriously restored to power, by no effort of our will, and we are ready for work again—just because we have passed through a short winter of unconsciousness. George Herbert says :

"Thus in Thy ebony-box
Thou dost enclose us, till the day
Put our amendment in our way
And give new wheels to our disorder'd clocks."

If sleep—which is a short death to brain and body, a state of helpless unconsciousness—can and does work such delightful miracles every night, then we can trust God when He wraps us in a deeper sleep in order to make us fresh and young again. When the winter of death is over and the great Eastertide arrives in God's eternal Spring, we shall be strong and eager to serve our Master in the

midst of new and grand opportunities. We can trust God and look forward to the spring when chilly autumn weather warns us of the coming winter. Let us trust Him also when troubles crowd thick and fast around us. If Christ comes nearer, revealing Himself to us as He did to the thief in the hour of agony, then we shall gain infinitely by the winter darkness.

I once saw in a hospital a young girl who had had both feet amputated. She was a little stranger, with no relatives in this country, but her face was always sunshiny and she cheered the whole ward by her glad singing. God was working one of His many miracles in her case—giving her spring sunshine in the winter.

Perhaps you have prayed for years for a coveted blessing, and God seemed to be deaf to your prayers. What did you gain? Courage, patience, trust, a certainty that your Father knew best, and many other good and lasting things. Have you never been surprised to discover that you were thanking God for not giving you something you had asked for? Yes, even though you still desire it. The prayer has led you onward and upward. You have clung to God's hand and looked often into His face. You have not been able to forget Him in His gifts, and the touch of His hand has kept you in the right path; His Presence has poured sweetness into your heart and given you secret

strength. You can wait for the visible answer to your prayer. Your ideal is still an untarnished and glorious vision, just because it is in your Father's hand, being kept safely for you. Would you change places with others who have swiftly and easily obtained their desires? Perhaps they have long ago forgotten the Giver, perhaps they have found that the gift is unsatisfying. We are like children who are not allowed to handle—as yet—their most valuable jewels. The only things that will never disappoint us are the things our Father is keeping for us. He loves us so well that He will not allow us to handle them too soon, lest we injure their beauty.

Trust and pray, though you see no answer to your prayers. The apparent silence may really be a proof of confidence in you. Perhaps God sees that you are strong, and is silent in order to make you stronger. If you wish to have power—power to help your weaker comrades—then you must, like Jacob, wrestle “until the breaking of the day.” We belong to a militant Church and cannot look for too easy a battle.

There is one strange story told of Him Whose business was doing good. A poor woman pleaded for her child and at first He seemed deaf to her loving, trustful prayer. Then he spoke words which must have sounded cold and harsh: “It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast

it to dogs." The disciples joined their appeal to that of the heartbroken mother. Were they more eager to hear and help than He? It looked like it, as it often appears to-day that men are more ready to relieve suffering than God is. But in His own good time our Lord not only granted that earnest, trustful prayer, He also spoke words of highest commendation: "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." We may be very sure that the torturing delay was great gain to her, and it has cheered millions of heartsick souls since, who know now that God's silence does not mean refusal.

Trained social workers of to-day are not always in a hurry to make unhappy people comfortable. They know that it often makes matters worse to heap gifts upon the poor. They see the evil of a surface healing of deep-rooted sores, which will only lay up more serious trouble for the future. If careless "charity" is condemned as "worse than useless" by social workers of large experience, why should we expect God to work in surface fashion. He is working for soul-beauty, for the perfecting of character; and it would be ruinous to character to make prayer a talisman, able to procure instantly for the user everything childishly desired.

When spring comes before its time there is usually great injury to vegetation as a result of late frosts. Let us be content to wait God's time for the flowers

to appear on the earth. A man gains treasures which can never be taken away from him when difficulties, doubts, failures, and sins have been fearlessly met and overcome. As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is a beloved son of God in this world. The Owner of the tree is looking for fruit—the fruit of love, joy, peace, and other priceless graces. When the apple tree stands bare and cold under the dull winter sky, stripped of all that makes life beautiful, it can look forward to the time that is coming, the time when new life will stir within its limbs and it shall again be adorned as a bride, again bear fruit to the glory of God and the service of men.

Those who follow the path marked out for them will find the Guide makes no mistakes, and that He is leading them to joy and peace.

But Death lies ahead, and perhaps we are filled with fear as we draw near to it. A heathen writer declared that death was the most terrible thing possible, because it was "the end." Really, we Christians sometimes speak as though he had been right! But when we stop to consider the matter we know better, don't we? "Death the end!" Why, it is more like the beginning. We may say that the year begins in January, but the new life wakes up in the springtime. When we step through the dark doorway into Life, let us do it with eager hope, for the best—God's Best—is "yet to be." What new light will be thrown on

the problems which perplex us now ! With what God-given power we shall be able to help our fellows ! How wonderful will be the Master's Welcome to His Garden of Paradise !

If we can be glad and secure when we are always facing Death, how much safer we shall feel when—for the first time in our lives—we turn our backs upon the last enemy, and stand with its Great Conqueror on the brighter side of the dark and difficult pass. To depart and be with Christ in His Palace Garden must be far better than anything we have ever known.

We *call* ourselves Christians, let us do more than that. Let us look up into our Risen Master's face and reflect His light. When we allow ourselves to be fearful, discouraged or unhappy we are denying His Presence with His loved Bride, the Church. The winter is already past in our hearts, and the Bride—if her eyes are lifted—can see with spiritual vision that her Beloved is invisibly beside her. Jesus lives ! He is here ! The world may be in Egyptian darkness, but the people of God have light in their homes. The Sun of Righteousness has Risen and the gloom of winter has fled before the spring.

"I have closed the door on Gloom.
His house has too narrow a view.
I must seek for my soul a wider room,
With windows to open to let in the sun,
And radiant lamps when the day is done,
And the breeze of the world blowing through."

CHAPTER VII

GROWING IN SUNSHINE

A woman clothed with the sun.—Rev. xii. 1.

Unto you that fear My Name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings.—Mal. iv. 2.

THE Church is the "woman clothed with the sun." She carries light into the dark places where sin has been reigning, for she is afire with God, like the bush in the desert. She is told to rejoice always, because her Lord is always with her. She is clothed with His righteousness, a garment of burning light. Those who live for Christ find the promise true that the Sun of Righteousness brings life and healing into their hearts. The Sun is always shining, but sometimes we turn our faces away from Him. Let us be like the plants in our windows, which refuse to look in any direction but towards the sunshine.

"I have closed the door on Doubt :
I will go by what light I can find,
Will hold up my hands and reach them out
To the glimmer of God in the dark, and call :
'I am Thine, though I grope and stumble and fall.
I serve : and Thy service is kind.' "

Bring darkness and light together, and the light must always conquer ; bring sadness into the Presence of Christ, and it will vanish before His great Joy. We

are commanded to "rejoice" just as much as we are commanded to be honest, so if we have no joy in our hearts we are living in sin.

God is faithful, and the promise to those who take up the cross and follow the King is continually being fulfilled: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it." No one can be constantly happy unless he is climbing up after higher and ever higher life. St. Paul's gladness was not dependent on the gratitude of those to whom he so willingly devoted himself. If he had been working for wages—even the wages of gratitude—he would not have poured out loving service so enthusiastically when it was often met by coldness, indifference or active opposition. Our Master, Who came to stand among us as one that serveth, must have found joy in stooping to wash His disciples' feet. He wants us all to taste that joy of willing service.

No one can read the wonderful story of the gentle Francis of Assisi without seeing the beauty of the child-like gladness, which was the natural result of his crystal purity of soul and wholehearted devotion to his fellows for Christ's sake. It is only a very shallow thinker who will dare to call him a "fanatic," just because his methods are not exactly what we approve of in this century. Though we may not feel that it is our duty to fling away all worldly possessions, and walk the earth barefoot

64 IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM

and homeless, as he did, yet all Christians are called to be like him in his singlehearted devotion to his Master. No story of romance could be more full of intense interest than the story of his life : and if it is interesting to read about his burning zeal, how much more interesting it must have been to live such a life of active love. No wonder he drew hearts after him by thousands, when he was continually drinking in the love of God and pouring it out on everyone he met. Each day was radiant with sunshine, for it was crammed with opportunities of service. He saw Christ everywhere, not only recognizing Him in the persons of men, but even in birds and flowers ; and to recognize Him was to spring instantly to serve Him in every possible way. His great joy—joy that rested not at all on external circumstances—has for hundreds of years been an inspiration to the world.

God wants His children to live in the sunshine, in order that they may grow strong and fruitful, and the days of easy comfort are not always days of inner sunshine. Take each day as a gift from the Father's hand, and let everybody see that you are glad to be alive in His world, glad to have every day fresh opportunities of serving Him.

"Each day a gift ! And life is made
Only of days, with gifts between."

The outside world may see no reason for rejoicing, and yet how forlorn the people who care nothing for

God are, when dark days come ! They can only rejoice in the outer sunshine, having no sunshine within. A sick woman told me that she knew a patient dying of cancer who had said to her ; " I am a heathen, I don't believe in God." There is no light visible to people who shut their eyes. What mockery it would seem to such a hopeless sufferer to tell her to rejoice. Yet I have seen a lovely woman in the same bodily condition whose face was always bright with joy.

If you are not sure of the love of God, as revealed in Christ, and if you want to be sure, make up your mind to do His will, and the promise "ye shall know," will most certainly be fulfilled. It may not be this year or next year, but no one has turned his face persistently towards the Sun of Righteousness without finding life transfigured, and commonplace duties glorified by His light. The joy of His Presence is like wings to the soul, lifting it above the jar and fret of everyday life.

No one can be clothed with the sun if he persists in always looking on the dark side of everything. A writer has declared that "a great bank of darkness envelops the world." I am doubtful about the truth of that statement, but I fully agree with him when he goes on to say : "Every true teacher is a torch-bearer advancing into this darkness. You cannot add to the general illumination by extinguishing the torches of others." That seems to

be the self-imposed task of pessimists. They are not satisfied to look themselves always on the dark side, but they usually hold up that dark side for inspection by others, who might possibly be able to believe in happiness if they were not constantly being reminded of the troubles of life. We must be careful not to spoil the sunshine of other people, or extinguish their torch-light of hope and good cheer. A chronic pessimist probably has no idea that he is refusing to believe in God's power of ordering aright His own world, and neglecting the duty of gratitude for all the blessings showered daily upon him.

What of ourselves? Do we not accept without much gratitude many rich blessings? God gives us love, health, prosperity, fresh air, fruit, flowers, food, eyesight, and countless other good things. We take them as a matter of course, with scarcely a word of thanks; and then grumble and complain if some little thing goes wrong. We make a fuss if we have one restless night—do we always remember to thank God for giving us hundreds of good nights? We complain about disagreeable weather—do we always look up and thank God for the fine days? A man in the desert, dying of thirst, would lift up his heart in deepest thankfulness if he were given a little water—though it might be warm and flavourless. Many a weary worker in a hot city slum, stitching day after day

in cramped and breathless quarters, would thank God eagerly for the fragrant breath which blows in hour after hour from our gardens. Why need we wait until the golden gifts of everyday are taken from us before we learn to value them and thank the Giver ?

"Open our eyes, Thou Sun of life and gladness,
That we may see that glorious world of Thine."

When the Israelites in the wilderness complained of their severe hardships "it displeased the Lord : and the Lord heard it ; and His anger was kindled." What a warning to us ! God has not changed, therefore He must still be displeased when His people murmur and complain, finding fault with His plans for their good. St. Paul tells us that those who murmured in the wilderness were "destroyed of the destroyer." If God so plainly showed the severity of His displeasure then—and these things are written for our admonition—will He lightly overlook the same sin now ? The anger of the Lord was kindled against the people "who were complainers," and yet—if we had been led along the same hard road—we might have fancied ourselves justified in grumbling. They were homeless and penniless, marching through a desert, unable to lay up provision two days ahead, often parched with thirst, weary and footsore.

If their sin was very great in God's sight, how much more displeased with us must He be when He hears us grumbling many times every month. They did not know that God loved them enough to die for them. We do know something of the love of Christ, and yet we are quick to complain if the rain stops a pleasure trip, if a letter is delayed, if we have to do some distasteful work or entertain a prosy visitor. Think how Jonah, who had just been saved by a marvellous deliverance, grumbled in very unprophet-like fashion when he had to endure a little discomfort.

Who dare say that the habit of grumbling is only a trifling fault? It is not only ingratitude towards God, but it can ruin the happiness of home-life almost more than a crime, for it is a constant irritation. It brings other evils also into the home. A doctor has said that many a man is the victim of dyspepsia, because he has a nagging wife who brings all her little troubles to talk over at meal-times. He says that he has known homes where both husband and children were kept in an unhealthy, nervous condition, simply from this cause.

The writer of the Book of Proverbs seems to think that it is usually the woman's fault if the atmosphere of a house is gloomy. Perhaps that is because women too often stay indoors and rigidly exclude the sunshine, determined to protect their complexions and carpets. Then, as a natural

result, they find it hard to be cheerful and hopeful. Sunshine is a nerve-tonic and life-restorer. And the sunshine of joy is a wonderful health-giver too. Those mysterious fighters within our bodies, which attack germs and resist disease, work more victoriously when we are happy. It is foolish as well as wrong to shut out the sunshine.

Think of the want of faith we show every time we grumble. Our lives are secure in God's keeping. He knows what training and environment we need, and He is faithfully giving us the best. Each word of complaint is a proof that we don't trust His wisdom and love. If He were to offer us the choice, we should be afraid to trust our own judgment and would answer: "Lord, choose for me, for I am sure to make mistakes." Then why are we so dissatisfied when He does choose for us? Why do we venture to find fault with His ordering, as though we could possibly know better than He the things really best for us?

"He knows we have not yet attained ; and so
He wearies not, but bears complaint and moan,
And shields each willing heart against His own.
Knowing that some glad day we too shall know."

The sin of complaining can never be conquered in negative fashion. It is not enough to keep from spoiling the happiness of other people, we must bring them sunshine. We must reflect the Light

of the world. Whatever the weather may happen to be outside our homes, it is our business—as Christians—to keep the inside as bright and pleasant as possible. Christians are commanded to be “the light of the world.” Every home should be a lighthouse to help strugglers outside, but the lamps should not wear shields reflecting all the light away from the family. Home courtesy is the most beautiful kind of courtesy—a flower that may be cultivated in any climate.

The Sun of Righteousness lightens the darkest hours. In “The Dawn at Shanty Bay”—a beautiful Christmas story by Robert Knowles—two men had been playing Santa Claus to a poor little girl. As they walked home under the stars, one of them said :

“There must a’ been a curious joy about dyin’ on the cross.”

“Joy !” echoed the other, “what dae ye mean ?”

“Oh, nothin’. Only it’s so much fun to give something—an’ that other was the high-water mark.”

Don’t you think that is true ? It is a joy to be able to give something for love’s sake ; so the greater the love and the gift, the deeper and fuller must be the joy. When Infinite Love laid Himself down on the altar of sacrifice for the people He loved, the Gift was not spoiled by any want of gladness. God loveth a cheerful giver, and His own

gifts are always bestowed cheerfully and joyously. It was just before He laid down His life that our Lord spoke most about His joy. It was then that He offered to His disciples His own Joy, then that He poured out a tender benediction of peace on the troubled hearts of those who loved Him. That benediction has such wondrous power that for nearly two thousand years it has rested like the touch of His own hand on troubled hearts. The very words are sweet : "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." The Cross had no power to disturb His kingly peace—peace enjoyed and bestowed so tranquilly and confidently. And peace was offered to the disciples together with its sister grace of joy.

Who knows best the meaning of joy ? Is it a man who shirks every hardship and discomfort that may be avoided, or the man who willingly shoulders heavy burdens because he loves greatly ? Think of the joy of men like Father Damien, who laid down his life in the leper colony of Molokai. He went there of his own free will, constrained by the love of Christ. There he cleansed sores, comforted the dying and ministered to sick souls and bodies. During sixteen years of marvellous self-sacrifice he absolutely identified himself with the stricken people, not content to say only "my people," but saying "we lepers." When he reached

the height of his Christ-like self-sacrifice by catching the awful disease which he had so fearlessly faced, and dying a leper among lepers, the world showed its admiration of his heroism by sending not only much money, but many volunteers to continue his work.

What joy must have filled the heart of Father Damien and other heroic followers of the Master of Love. If they had not rejoiced in the opportunity and privilege of spending their lives in noble service, the world would not have caught fire from their inspiring examples.

Think of the joy of Him Who, by the Offering once made for the sins of the world, claimed even on the Cross the right to forgive His murderers and admit the penitent by His side into the royal park of Paradise. Think of the joy of knowing that the mighty work of redemption was finished. Think of the Good Shepherd's joy as He stood between the sheep He loved and their terrible foe.

What of ourselves? Are we adding to His joy by accepting trustfully whatever He gives? Or are we hurting Him by doubting His love every time we can see no light except the light of His face? Are we dwelling on our troubles, and so carrying darkness instead of light wherever we go?

When pain is given to us to endure we have no right to behave like unbelievers. They do not know that their Father has all power in heaven and

earth, that He loves them enough to give them all necessary training, and will not send one trouble that is not needed. We do know this. Are we showing by the gladness of our faces that our hearts are not troubled nor afraid? Can we truthfully echo these words?

"We take with solemn thankfulness
Our burden up, nor ask it less,
And count it joy that even we
May suffer, serve, or wait for Thee,
Whose will is done."

We gaze up into the Master's face as He hangs upon the Cross, knowing well that no nails could have held Him there if He had not been ready and willing to suffer as a ransom for many. Are we complaining instead of rejoicing, because we also are given the task of enduring some small amount of pain in the service of others? One who was passing through a dark hour received this gladdening message from an old friend: "You are having a rare experience and must feel that God has shown you special favour."

Don't let us be satisfied with the poor success of submitting to troubles because we can't help ourselves. God has called each of us to rejoice with the joy of the martyr, who gladly lays down his life at his Master's feet. All are not called to die for Christ, but all are called to be ready to die. A life is just as really laid down for Christ, if spent in

74 IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM

His service, as the life of a martyr. The faithful servants who had made diligent use of the talents entrusted to them, were called to enter into their Lord's joy. If there is no joy in our serving, no joy in our endurance of pain, then our love must be of very poor quality. We are even now called to enter into the joy of our victorious Leader. He is the Ladder linking heaven with earth, and the only outward and visible link between earth and heaven is the rainbow—the sunshine glorifying storm.

"O Joy that sseekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to Thee :
I trace the rainbow through the rain
And feel the promise is not vain,
That morn shall tearless be."

CHAPTER VIII

BEAUTY AND FRUITFULNESS

As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons.—CANT. ii. 2, 3.

THE owner of a garden looks in it for three things—beauty, fragrance, and fruitfulness. These garden-graces are beautifully typified in the verses given above, picturing the purity and fragrance of ideal womanhood and the glory of righteous manhood. In these days we hear so much about the equality of the sexes that the fundamental difference between them is apt to be forgotten. Our Lord, who has lifted woman into a position of highest honour, has set His seal to the statement of the inspired historian that "He which made them at the beginning made them male and female." Man and woman are not the same, but each is the complement of the other.

Let us look at the symbols given in our text and see what meaning they convey to our Western minds.

The lily stands as the embodiment of purity and fragrance. It is the flower associated in our minds with the holy maid of Nazareth. Think of her as she bowed in meek trustfulness before God, accepting unquestioningly from His hand her high

and difficult commission. She still, after all these centuries of progress, holds up before our beauty-loving hearts the highest ideal of womanly loveliness. She is still the type of woman honoured by God and revered by men.

I am not saying that I disapprove of woman suffrage, but can you imagine that quiet woman—the woman who pondered in the secret depths of her heart the awful mysteries of the Incarnation—noisily clamouring for the rights of her sex? Would you think of calling a fierce militant suffragette a “lily among thorns?”

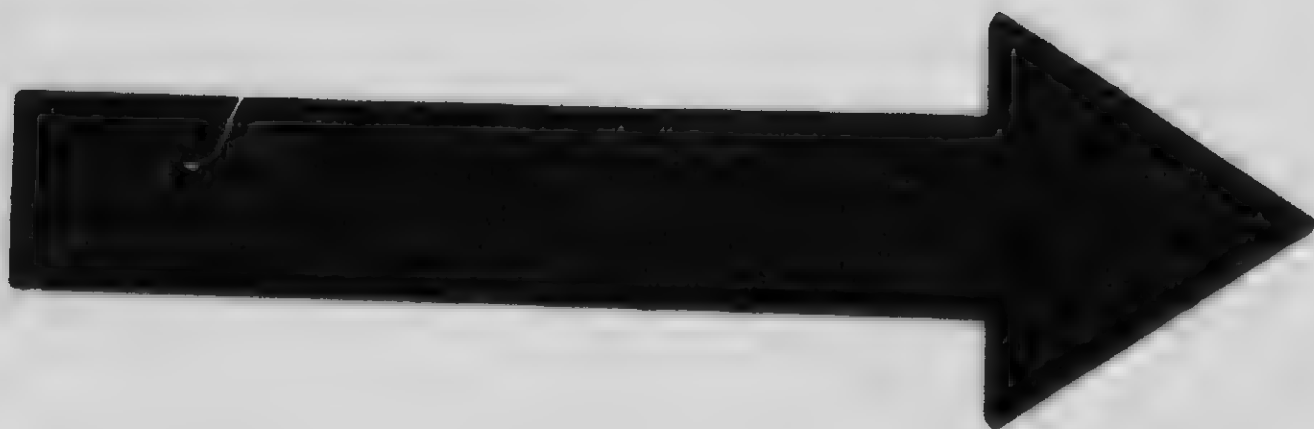
The King greatly desires thy beauty. He delights in the priceless glory of purity, and the fragrance of unselfish prayers and service, rising silently and ceaselessly from earth to heaven. He seeks beauty and fragrance in the lives of men as well as women. They also are members of His Church, of the Bride He is cleansing and purifying that He may present Her to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. Each unhallowed thought cherished in the heart of a Christian is a stain on the shining robes of the King's loved Bride and a blow at His honour. She is His own, bought with His life; and no thought of any of Her members can fail to touch Him as if it were His very own. He still bears our sins.

The lily among thorns may be living in obscurity. The towering brambles may hide her beauty from the world, and yet she cherishes her radiant purity as a priceless treasure. The air is fragrant all about her, although no one but God may know from whence the fragrance proceeds. So it is with a lovely life. The secret heart is a white temple of purity, though it is hidden from every eye but God's. An unconscious influence for good is constantly flowing out from such a life, reaching many people who do not know from whence the inspiration comes. Hidden goodness is less likely to be tarnished by the desire to win praise and admiration. It has been suggested that there could be a great deal of good done in the world if people did not care who got the credit of it. So the fragrance of the lily is poured out to cheer many who accept the sweetness without seeking for or thanking the giver. Joy is found in serving, not in receiving thanks for service.

"What in love we yield to others, by a charm we still retain,
For the loved one's acquisition is the lover's double gain."

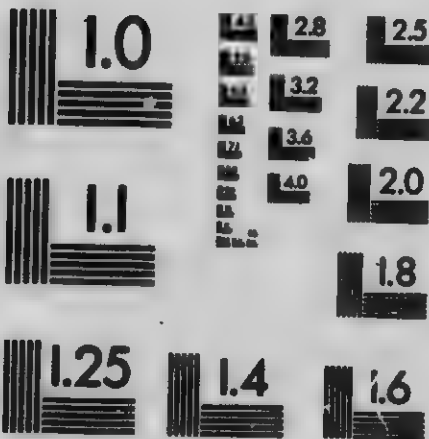
Now let us look at the second garden-grace: Fruitfulness. "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons."

There is a strange story told of a man who was nicknamed "Appleseed Johnny," because during many years he travelled far and wide through the American forests, carrying large bags filled with



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apple seeds. Here and there in the lonely woods he cleared and rudely fenced tiny orchards, and planted them with seeds. Years afterwards he passed over the same route, grafting on the young apple trees branches from good stock. Through his unselfish industry many new settlers found valuable fruit trees ready to minister to their needs, when they cleared the ground for their homes in the forest. It must have been a very welcome sight to discover an apple tree here and there among the trees of the wood.

We can imagine how the lofty forest trees might look down on the stranger in their midst. "How insignificant he looks and how plain his leaves are," they might whisper scornfully. How graceful and free they looked as they tossed their ungrafted boughs high above his humble head. They would not feel it an honour to be like the apple tree among the great kings of the forest.

But the settler came and cleared one after another out of his way. Little he cared for their beauty or pride when he wanted room for his grain. They were cut into lengths for his fences or his winter fires, while the despised stranger—the humble apple tree—was carefully protected and cultured. Why? Because, year after year, it gave its good and wholesome fruit for the good of the family. It was not seeking for admiration but aimed at a life of quiet usefulness and willing service.

The apple is the household standby nearly the whole of the year. Other fruits may be more showy : but the rich red of cherry, strawberry or raspberry, and the bloom of peach, grape or plum, fade swiftly into the ugliness of decay.

Think, also, how far it can reach in its helpfulness. The tree may grow here in Ontario, but one barrel of its fruit may be shipped thousands of miles to the distant West, while another may give pleasure to a dozen families in old London, where apples are sold at so much apiece. Year after year it lays its golden or rosy fruit at the feet of man, giving of its very life, without asking any reward but the pleasure of doing good. Like the righteous man, whom the Psalmist describes as planted in the courts of the house of the Lord, it still brings forth fruit in old age to the glory of God and for the service of man.

So the apple tree is as valuable among the trees of the wood as the beloved of God among the sons of men. One who sets his heart on a career of useful service has a far higher ambition than one who is seeking renown for himself.

Last night I was at an open air service, and one of the hymns thrown by a lantern on the white sheet had beneath it the inscription:—"Jane E. Leeson, 1842." How little that gentle-hearted lover of children dreamed that the verses she gave to the world would, after 70 years, be scattered as

living seeds in the hearts of men, women and children, gathered together on a vacant lot in Toronto.

The crowd also sang enthusiastically a familiar metrical version of the great Shepherd Psalm. I thought of the gladness David must feel, as his sure confidence in the care of the Good Shepherd awakens every day a response in many troubled hearts. Thousands of years ago he gave to the world the ripe fruit of his spiritual experience, and that fruit is still wholesome and refreshing. He offered it to all within reach, and it has reached millions upon millions. If that one Psalm had been his only gift to the world, he would still have served not only his own generation—as his epitaph declared—but all future generations. The world will never allow that Psalm to pass into oblivion.

The great fruit of the Spirit—the one that includes all the rest—is Love, and love must express itself in words and actions. Love and barrenness never go together, but love's very life is fruitfulness.

The lily yields her fragrance without knowing how many are cheered by it ; and the apple tree sends out its fruit, not knowing how far it may travel. So it is with fragrant and helpful lives. Our Lord's counsel about the giving of alms is that the left hand must not know what the right hand is giving. It may be possible to give so secretly that another person in the house knows nothing about your act, but it seems almost impossible to

hide it from yourself. And yet the text does not demand forgetfulness of your good deeds, but unconsciousness of them. This fits in with the account of the Last Judgment given by St. Matthew, where those on the right of the King express surprise at the announcement that they have performed many kind actions, while those on the left are equally astonished to hear that they have let slip their opportunities.

The only way actions may be absolutely unconscious is to make them habitual. One who has cultivated the art of doing kindnesses every day, until it has become second nature, is kind without knowing it. Kindness flows from him without conscious effort, as fragrance from the lily. Good habits control us quite as much as bad ones. Take the matter of a pleasant voice, for instance. We all know people whose tones are always amiable and cheerful. To hear a harsh note in the voice of such a person would be a real shock. And we make no mistake when we say that such a person finds it easy to speak in friendly, pleasant fashion to every creature within reach—even to the cat and dog. Of course it is easy, as easy as it is to you to read this page ; because it has been steadily persevered in until it has become second nature, and to speak irritably would be next thing to impossible. It is the same way in the matter of giving alms—and "alms" must include more than money. I know a

82 IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM

dear lady who finds the doing of kindnesses as natural as breathing. Why? Because she has all her life been kind to anyone within reach, forming a habit through lifelong practice. The children who live near her know well that she loves to feed them with ripe fruit. The boy who comes with groceries is given a piece of pie, and the ice-man often gets a cool drink.

She is perfectly unconscious that her actions are unusual. Oh, yes, she will read this, but she will think I am talking about someone else. Her left hand is unconscious of the everyday gifts of her right.

Think of the way some mothers are unconsciously heaping up acts of kindness in the treasury of the King. He will not lose out of His treasure one "cup of cold water," held to a fretful child's lips by the weary but smiling mother in the dead of night. He never fails to notice when she lays aside her own personal wishes to join in a game of play or go off on some outing to please the children.

It is a great mistake to think that unselfishness is scarce. There are plenty of men who are blessing the world with their widespread philanthropy—like the apple tree—and there are multitudes of hidden lives giving out their quiet influence like fragrance, purifying the air around them.

If we are only living for ourselves—even though it be for our own spiritual perfecting—what is the

world better for our living in it? "No man liveth to himself," says the Apostle. Why, even the little drops of rain and the humble blades of grass, which we tread carelessly under foot as of little worth, are serving the world. Shall man—the highest and noblest creature on the earth—lag behind in this generous determination to spend life in willing service? We might be able to walk unburdened, if we selfishly determined to have an easy time and let other people look out for themselves. Would such an easy life be worth living, do you think?

"Dream not of noble service elsewhere wrought :
The simple duty that awaits thy hand
Is God's voice uttering a Divine command :
Life's common deeds build all that saints have thought."

And yet even the desire of "helping everywhere" can become an evil if it be not balanced by other virtues—the virtue, for instance, of minding one's own business. To offer advice which is not wanted is a very common way of doing harm. Tact has been defined as "the art of withholding on proper occasions information which we are quite sure would be good for people." We are not the only workers in the neighbourhood, and we must not officiously undertake work which God has allotted to someone else. It is possible to be so persistent in our determination to help others, that we rub them the wrong way, and instead of getting into touch with

them we rouse their dislike as "meddlers." The "divine gift of commonsense" is worth a great deal to Christian workers, who want to get into helpful touch with their fellows.

It is useless to try to influence others for good unless one is struggling against sin in his own heart. The influence of personality is bound to make its presence known, filling the air like the fragrant breath of the lily hidden among thorns. Every odour is not pleasant, and the influence of the personality may destroy the influence of good advice. As Emerson exclaims : "How can I hear what you say when what you *are* is thundering in my ears ?"

There is a marvellous attractiveness about real Christianity, a beauty in the life of one who is really walking humbly in the footsteps of Christ, which is very inspiring. It is sham Christianity that rouses the scorn of the world. When we see a man or woman with a soul of unstained purity, living a life of unselfish service, we can't help wanting to be better than we are.

It is easy to talk as though St. Peter's advice to wives were out-of-date, when he says that they may win their husbands to the faith of Christ, if their adornment is not "that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel," but is the beauty of heart, the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit which is in the sight of God of great price. This inner beauty—which every-

one may possess—can never be out-of-date, can never lose its value. A man may joke and laugh boisterously with a woman whose conversation is far from being "chaste, coupled with fear." But he is influenced far more by a woman in whose presence he could not tell a "risky story," for it would die on his lips, ashamed before the whiteness of her soul, and he would shrink from her clear-eyed scorn.

If the desert is to rejoice and blossom as the rose, then our own corner must not be barren and ugly. We must ask the Divine Gardener to plant good seeds in our hearts, and we must allow Him full control in our affairs. We must try to beautify our corner by being glad and helpful, then we shall sow good seeds instead of thorns and thistles. The Master knows the kind of soil each plant in His garden needs, and if He has planted us in the pleasant enclosure of ordinary home life, then that is the best place we could possibly find to grow in.

We are inspired by the story of some hero's witness for Christ, and we long to live gloriously and die bravely. Then, perhaps, we forget our aspirations and speak crossly to someone, pass on some unkind bit of gossip, or do our best to gain some personal advantage at another's expense. So we are making our corner ugly instead of beautiful, and are disappointing our King.

A fragrant, fruitful life is more inspiring than any sermon. If your life is hidden with Christ, if your secret thoughts are shining with purest joy ; then your silent and unconscious influence will sweeten and purify the neighbourhood, rising up like incense to God in heaven. If the power you daily draw from the touch of God is not dissipated in religious excitement, but spends itself in useful work ; then you are certainly a power for good in the world. You don't know how many struggling souls might say of you—

"Because of your strong faith I kept the track
Whose sharp-set stones my strength had well-nigh spent.
I could not meet your eyes if I turned back :
So on I went.

CHAPTER IX

KNOWN BY FRUITS

Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.—St. MATT. vii. 16, 17.

IN the text given above our Lord is warning His followers to beware of false prophets, who may look as harmless as sheep but are like wolves in heart. But the heart is not visible to man, secret thoughts cannot be known except by God. It might seem so, and yet our Lord's words are true in our experience. "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things."

How can the world know the disciples of Christ? The Master Himself has told us that those who love one another shall be known by all men as His disciples. But how can men know whether there is love in a heart or not?

We are not as able as we imagine to hide our thoughts. They may seem to be intangible and invisible, and yet it is out of thoughts that the solid eternal building of our lives must be made. We are to-day what our past thoughts have made us—the

thoughts we have given house-room for years. If your heart is a loving one your acquaintances will know it. If there is coldness instead of warmth in your heart, they will know that, too.

Ruth the Moabiteess was a stranger in Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest. A month or two later Boaz said to her that all the people of Bethlehem knew that she was a virtuous woman. If the love and goodness in the heart of a stranger was so soon revealed to the people of Bethlehem, how much more certain is it that all men know the secret motives which sway the outward lives of the neighbours who have lived beside them for years. In a city it may be possible to live near a man without knowing much about his character, but that is scarcely possible in the country. We are apt to jump hastily to conclusions, of course, and often make mistakes in our judgment of others ; but on the whole we know whether a life is inspired by love, or by the ambition to be rich, popular or famous. We know when a man would rather "be better than he seems," or "seem better than he is." We know instinctively when it is safe to put confidence in another person. Human nature is not always consistent, and a good man may sometimes act very selfishly, while a bad man may occasionally surprise everybody by rising to an unexpected height of unselfishness. But the fact that people are surprised when this happens, shows that it is

the exception which proves the rule. A good tree is still good, even if some of its fruit be undeveloped or wormy. The Church is still the salt of the earth, the great influence which has preserved it from hopeless corruption, even though every member of the Church is far from perfect.

It is useless to tell anyone that you are a disciple of Christ, unless you prove it by showing some outward signs of love. Love is the one unmistakable sign that a man has the spirit of Christ, and "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." But it is only a hypocrite who loves in word and tongue, while he is unloving in deed and in truth. Love that bears no fruit is as dead as faith without works.

In our Lord's picture of the Judgment Day the division between the sheep and the goats is based on outward actions rather than on motives. Those who have been actively kind are placed on the right hand of the King, while those who have neglected their opportunities of showing kindness are placed on the left.

A life that does not bear good fruit is terribly like the life of the church in Sardis—it is only a name. We have no right to our place in the Garden of God unless we are bringing forth some fruit of love. If we can do no other active work in the world, we can always pray, and so direct streams of blessing towards the other parts of the Garden.

The King meets us everywhere ; therefore we must act towards everyone—friends or enemies—as we would towards Him. Those who persecute others, or are unkind to them, are persecuting their Master. Those who gladly give to another a "cup of cold water" are ministering to the King. Those who pass by on the other side when they see a case of distress, are refusing their help to Christ. It is not only in the cool of the day that the Word of God walks in His Garden, but He seeks us there every hour.

"Heaven is so near—it's the morning beaming,
The dusk's still hour, with the starlight gleaming,
Loved lips at the gate and the dear night's dreaming."

The Master is in His Garden, looking for fruit—good fruit. A busy life is not always a fruitful one in His sight. It is possible to rise early and late take rest, and work all day long ; yet be living only for this world, without a thought of God or of spiritual things. Even Martha, who was trying to serve Christ, pleased Him less than her sister who sat in quiet devotion at His feet. If there is one good fruit we are apt to crowd into a small corner of our lives it is prayer. It is possible to rush about doing good works, filling up every cranny of each day, and omitting—or hurrying through as if it were very unimportant—our communion with God. I am not intending to preach

at you ; I am looking straight at myself, and taking for granted that you are like me—though I hope you are not. While we are busy about our Master's business we must not let the Master Himself be crowded out of our hearts and thoughts.

Our Lord's first recorded words are the declaration that He must be about His Father's business ; and He never wavered in the pursuit of that high ambition until the very end, when He was able to declare confidently that the work given into His hands was "Finished." Whether He was working in the cottage home, or offering Himself gloriously on the altar of the Cross for the sins of the world, He was always doing perfectly His Father's business.

Are we really trying very hard to follow in His steps ? Is it the business of our lives—of each week-day—to "succeed" in this life (as the world counts success) or is it our business to do the work God puts into our hands, counting it success when we have pleased Him, and failure when we have been irritable, downhearted or ungenerous ? If we are not bent on doing our own will, but living out the prayer, "Thy Will be done," keeping our eyes on God so that we may know His Will, then He must be finding some fruit in our lives.

The Owner of the Garden is looking for good fruit and will not be satisfied with a fair show of leaves. The tree that is barren for years cannot

be permitted to cumber the ground. Would any farmer keep a barren, fruitless tree in his orchard ?

"But what is fruit ?" do I hear you saying ? St. Paul answers that question in these words : "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."

Are you controlled by love ? Do you work for love of God and your neighbour, or only in order to be thought industrious, or in order to "get on in the world ?"

Are you filled with joy, so that you look up into God's Face very often, thanking Him for His Love, so that your face is radiant with gladness as you go about your ordinary work ?

Do you know the peace which passeth all understanding—the peace of one whose heart rests on the Heart of the Father ?

Are you gentle and good tempered in your dealings with others ? Are you honest in business, preferring to lose an advantage for yourself rather than defraud another ?

Do you really believe that God is Living and Near, or are your ideas about Him vague and shadowy—as "Providence," or "A Great First Cause ?"

Have you any of the spirit of meekness, or do you resent the smallest offence as if it were a deadly insult and as if you had never promised to forgive ?

If other people call you "touchy," and you call yourself "sensitive," then it is time to pray earnestly for the rare gift of meekness.

And have you the last grace on the Apostle's list—temperance? It is not won only by wearing a blue ribbon: it is the power of balance, of valuing important things most, and keeping one's poise without intemperance in anything.

If the Master comes seeking good fruit, and finds in us few or none of these precious graces, we must appeal to Him for help. We need His Life always—how else can any branch in Him bear fruit? The fruit on a tree comes from the life constantly welling up within that tree. Except in the case of a Christmas-tree it is never fastened on from the outside. And the fruit of goodness can only come from the Divine Life abiding in the heart.

It will not be considered a trifling matter if we are not actively bad, when we are expected to be actively good. When the owner of a fig tree looked in vain for figs he gave the terrible order, "Cut it down." What would you do if an apple tree was covered every year with leaves, yet never produced an apple? Would you allow it to take up valuable space in your orchard? You may have many trees in your orchard, but the barren one would not be overlooked; and God has many lives to watch but He studies each one.

No one can hide from His searching examination, and it is useless to say to Him, "I am as good as my neighbours." He knows whether that is true, and He also knows, perhaps, that you have been more carefully trained and taught, and should therefore be much better than your neighbours.

The Master comes every day and looks for fruit. Has He found any good fruit in us to-day, or "nothing but leaves?"

"Nothing but leaves! No garnered sheaves
Of life's fair, ripened grain;
Words, idle words for earnest deeds;
We sow our seeds—lo! tares and weeds
We reap with toil and pain—nothing but leaves."

A life always preaches more loudly than words. That is the reason God came to earth to live with men. Living and serving—that is the example our God is always setting. He is the Greatest, and therefore He is ready to serve every creature He has made. He dresses the flowers, feeds the birds, and provides for our every need. Do we want any grander chance in life than the chance of serving?

Can't you consecrate your everyday work by sometimes slipping into your room and kneeling at the feet of the King? If that is not possible, at least you can look from time to time into His face, asking Him to accept your work as a love-

gift. You want to live with Him in joy after death. Why need you wait? He is ready to live with you in joy here.

It is always pleasant to serve the people who are appreciative, who pay liberally with the useful coin of praise. But if we are working for the approval of men our work will be of as poor quality as it is safe to offer, and there will be little love or joy in it. When we have done our best to please, and have only won blame for some trifling defect, we may feel that it is useless to try again—it is so hard to give satisfaction. Well, let us choose another motive for our work, seeking to please God rather than men. Then joy will spring up without being searched for, and in the most unlikely places.

Archdeacon Stuck found great joy in the midst of cold and ice—the joy of building a church farther north than anyone had ever planted the Gospel before. He said that he felt as Columbus must have felt when he planted his banner in a new world. A lady who went as a missionary to Alaska, devoting herself to a few ignorant children and natives, and living in close, cramped quarters with people who “always smelt fishy,” said: “I would rather be here than in any place in the world.”

It is working for souls that brings most joy, though any kind of service—done for love’s sake—can give the servant “a good time.” If you have never willingly served a disagreeable person you

have missed a great deal of pleasure. When the Master took a slave's duty, and washed the feet of His disciples, He must have rejoiced as He tenderly touched the flesh of the beloved St. John. But there must have been a deeper joy in His ministry to the man who had done Him a deadly wrong. There must have been a sweetness in returning good for evil as He washed the feet of Judas, and tried by that loving touch to reach his miserable heart. Was that washing of the feet thrown away? Is any loving service thrown away? Perhaps the lingering touch of those kind hands helped the desperate Judas to loathe his sin so soon. Of one thing I feel sure, that the love of Christ for His unlovely apostle never failed. How could Infinite Love die out in darkness?

We admire St. Stephen's splendid care for his foes, and honour him for the dying prayer which sprang instinctively to his lips: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge!" But, when we are given the chance to do some kindly deed or speak a generous word for one who has said something unkind about us, perhaps we realize that it is not easy—though it is grand and noble—to serve kindly those who are unfriendly.

We judge by fruits—the fruits of love. I once heard a man speak with generous kindness about another who had done him a terrible wrong: and

by that token I knew him to be in reality a disciple of the King of Love.

"Ye shall know them by their fruits," says our Lord ; and men judge the religion of Christ by the acts of His disciples. What a grand thing it would be for missions if the name of Christian were a guarantee of faithfulness—in small things as well as in large—all the world over.

I read in the paper, not long ago, that on one occasion when the Emperor of Japan was going on a railway-journey he insisted that all the men on his train must be Christians. It was not that he was a Christian himself, but he judged that Christians could be depended on.

But even in Japan some of the professed servants of Christ are doing harm to His cause by their failure to bring forth good fruits. A Japanese writer, Yoshio Markino, has described in one of his lately-published books his eager study of the Christian religion. He declares that Christians gave him very little sympathy, although he was studying the Bible with heart and soul, and trying his hardest to believe in it. He owns that a few missionaries won his heart by their Christlikeness, but others were hateful in his eyes, because they did not seem to him honourable in business. He could not trust them in spiritual matters because he judged them by their everyday fruits. It is not only in heathen lands that the selfish or dishonourable

conduct of a professing Christian brings disgrace on the cause of his Master and blocks its progress.

We judge character by conduct. In one of Edna Lyall's stories the hero was accused of being a thief, and circumstantial evidence seemed conclusively to stamp that name upon him. But the people who knew him best were sure that his own word was worth more than any amount of circumstantial evidence. His character was above suspicion and they judged him by his fruits. Did you ever think of the wonderful trust which Joseph of Nazareth showed towards his betrothed? He knew that her soul was white and beautiful, therefore he believed in her when she could offer no proof of her stainlessness. If anyone believes unfalteringly in you, with a trust which will endure in calm serenity even when circumstantial evidence is black against you, then you are blessed indeed.

Why did the Chinese Government appeal to the Christians in China to set aside April 27th, 1913, as a day of special prayer for the new Republic? It is the first time in the world's history that such a request has come from a non-Christian nation. It was because the Chinese could see the power of Christianity in the lives of Christians. They judged the religion by its fruits.

The power of a life that is really consecrated to Christ, really reflecting His light of love, is absolutely incalculable. If your faith be only a matter

of theory it will do very little to convince others. To believe, as a fact of history only, that the Founder of our faith was crucified and rose again, will not inspire anyone who knows you with a desire to find Him. But if you live in the gladness of His felt Presence, if you are holy in thought, kind in word and righteous in act, the people who know you will seek to know your Master also.

How can strangers be attracted towards the Master when His professed disciples sacrifice honesty for gain, or purity for a loveless, wealthy marriage? How can they believe in the love of Jesus when His witnesses are so lovelessly eager about the latest bit of scandal? How can they believe in the priceless value of the kingdom of heaven, when those who claim to belong to that kingdom appear to be interested only in their earthly concerns? It is a solemn thought that we may be keeping others away from Christ. If we are hypocrites, professing belief in One Who is crowded out of our lives almost entirely, shall we not bring down on ourselves the terrible condemnation, addressed to unfruitful professors of religion long ago?—"Woe unto you, . . . hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in."

If a man lives in a place for years and the place is no better for his presence there, he is a dead

failure. I don't care whether he has piled up millions or has thrown away a fortune. He has certainly been a barren tree in God's Garden if his neighbours are not helped by him. We are all commissioned—as the apostles were—to make disciples of all nations. We are all sent out by the King to be labourers in His vineyard. All who know us should be able to take knowledge of us that we have been with JESUS, that He is controlling our thoughts, words and actions. They should see some reflection of His beauty of holiness in our everyday lives.

Never be discouraged about good seed you have tried to sow in your neighbourhood. There may be no visible result for many years, but the life of the seed is not dead—simply waiting. If your religion is only skin-deep your neighbours will see through it, and will be apt to despise it and you. If it begins in the heart and is the inspiration of your daily life—on Saturday as well as on Sunday—it cannot fail to tell for good in your neighbourhood.

"Go, make thy garden as fair as thou canst ;
Thou workest never alone ;
Perchance he whose plot is next to thine
Will see it, and mend his own."

CHAPTER X

THE PRUNING OF FRUIT-BEARING BRANCHES

Every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.—ST. JOHN xv. 2.

Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous : nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.—HEB. xii. 11.

THE Owner of the Garden understands the needs of every branch that grows in it. He does not always allow the best people to have the easiest time. He knows that one who is already bearing fruit is capable of bringing forth more fruit. Once a woman was laid aside for a time and called to endure much pain. A friend wrote to her :

"God must love you very much or He would not give you so much to bear for Him."

It was an inspiring message, and worth more than any amount of weak lamenting over the inevitable. Perhaps you are called to endure a really great trouble. The Master does not explain why this is, and He must have good reasons for silence. How glad He is if you are trusting Him with the cheerful courage of a hero, instead of lying down in a huddled-up heap under the cross, with your face turned sulkily away from every possible gleam

of sunshine which may find its way into your dark corner.

Perhaps one you love has been lifted out of your sight. Can't you keep in living touch with him through Christ, Who is clasping his hand and trying to clasp yours? Is there no one left on earth to love? While love is reaching out through prayer and service, the outlook cannot be entirely dark and hopeless.

Have you pain of body or heart to endure? He Who is the True Vine, giving life to each of the branches, was perfected through sufferings, and we do not wish to miss our "perfecting" which is so dear to the Master's heart. He can never be satisfied while any of us are "moderately good" Christians. The ideal set before us is the perfection of our Father in Heaven. His object in watching over our lives is not to make us comfortable, but good. We pray for holiness, and then complain when we are purged by pain. How often we hear the surprised question: "How can God be just and loving, when He leaves His faithful servants to suffer?" That was the kind of comfort Job's friends gave him, insinuating a doubt of his faithfulness as they could not doubt God's justice. We ought to know better, with the Holy One, in agony of body, heart and spirit, hanging on the Cross. We may not be able to explain the necessity of suffering, but we know it was in His case

no sign of the Father's anger nor of His injustice. While we are very young and untried we picture to ourselves the joy and glory of martyrdom for a great cause, but after years of experience we know that sometimes the glory is hidden under an ugly exterior. The chastening seems very hard to endure, but we can accept it trustfully, knowing that the sorrow shall not only be succeeded by joy, but shall be "turned into" joy. We shall find the ugly cross transformed into a crown of glory.

The troubles which come to us pass through our Lord's hands, and are carefully proportioned to our need. I have heard that in weighing radium the weights used are so tiny that a microscope is needed to see them. The Creator of radium is not behind His children in careful exactness.

The Master cares for His Garden Himself, and we can trust Him to make no mistakes. He will not weakly give us anything that will injure our spiritual growth, just because we foolishly ask for it. We should not dare to pray at all if there were any chance of our short-sighted petitions changing His Will. "Prayer is not to bend God's Will to ours, but to raise our will to God's." If a little ignorant child trustfully begged his father to fill his hands with the shining coals in the grate, the father would show his love by not giving them. If he could be unloving enough to grant that foolish prayer, the child—hurt both in body and heart by

the cruel advantage taken of his inexperience—would be afraid to ask for anything in future.

God wants us to grow in holiness, therefore He does not make life always easy and comfortable. He knows that unless the cross is cheerfully "taken up" it may embitter instead of sweeten a soul. A disagreeable duty must be done by someone. One and another may pass it by, with a shrug of the shoulders and a half-formed thought, "Why should I do it?" At last one, who cares more about helping others than about his own comfort, stoops and lifts the burden. He is glad to do more than is absolutely forced on him, glad to follow in the steps of One Who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame.

In the Passion-Play of Ober-Ammergau there is one of the minor scenes which is very touching. It is when the Christus has fallen beneath the cross, and Simon is seized by the soldiers and compelled to lift the shameful burden. At first he struggles, exclaiming, "Indeed I am innocent; I have committed no crime." Then he sullenly submits, because resistance is evidently useless. Then he accepts the heavy cross willingly, standing up beneath it with uplifted head and radiant face, saying, "What is this I see? This is the holy man from Nazareth. For the love of Thee will I carry it. Oh, would that thereby I could make myself useful to Thee."

If we were ready to take up the cross willingly, for love of our Lord, we should make life easier for all about us ; and our own souls would grow in strength and beauty by the daily exercise of patient endurance.

Even when we try to shirk all the unpleasant things which can be avoided, God does not allow us to entirely escape life's valuable schooling. Do you ask how God can be loving and kind when He lays such heavy burdens on His children ? He wants them to grow in the beauty of holiness, and to be strong and helpful to their comrades, and He knows that many of the most priceless lessons of life can only be learned through pain. Even if His children are given no choice, if they are "compelled" to bear pain of body or heart, they will grow swiftly in beauty of spirit if they stand bravely beneath the burden, saying, "For the love of Thee will I bear it."

To take up a heavy cross once or twice in a lifetime will not make a character strong and beautiful : but one who accepts the everyday pruning and training of the Master, with sweet and trustful gladness, will daily become more like Him Who is altogether lovely.

If Simon the Cyrenian was given the privilege of helping to lift the burden of the Saviour of the world, have we not all the same glorious privilege ? "All His are thine to serve." Christ is one with

the least of His brethren ; in serving a fretful baby or a helpless invalid you are most surely serving Him—if the service is inspired by love. If you consider it an interruption when the Master calls, then it must be because you do not recognize His voice. His calls cannot possibly be an interruption to one who loves Him.

When "Sister Dora," of the Walsall Hospital for Waifs and Strays, lay down to rest after her hard day's work, there was a bell hanging over her head with this inscription : "The Master is come and calleth for thee." Any night-call to care for one of His poor children was recognized as a call from the Master she loved.

But the path of service is not an easy one. Our Lord chose a path of action which resulted in terrible suffering, chose it of His own free will because it was the royal road of Love. Are we, who have promised to follow Him, free to choose the easiest possible path? We pray for the fruit of love, the fruit which comprehends all the other graces. But love can never come to perfection without much pruning. To love is to give up one's own pleasure for the good of others, to choose the hardest duties that others may have lighter burdens to bear, to hide one's own pain that others may not be saddened. God wants us to be loving and we want to learn this greatest of all lessons, therefore we can accept thankfully and joyously the pruning of the Divine Husbandman.

THE PRUNING OF BRANCHES 107

While we are daily accepting trustfully all the training He sees to be necessary, we are daily ripening in righteousness. Looking back, when the pain is over, we shall see that it was necessary.

"No need for me to know the secrets hid
Between the leaves of the unopened yeas ;
'Tis not my part to lift the casket's lid,
Or seek to analyse the smiles and tears
God treasures there ; He knows I am secure,
Within His arms I can His choice enjoy, endure."

Whatever God's promises about prayer may mean, they certainly don't mean that He is weakly indulgent. Prayer is not a magic wand, bringing down instantly exactly what the petitioner thinks he needs. This would be a very upset world if we were trusted with absolute power. At the first serious difficulty we should pray for an easy road, and should miss the lasting power gained by struggle. At the touch of agony we should pray for relief, and lose the chance of growing in patience and endurance. When we could not see more than a step ahead, we should pray for light, and Trust would never grow in beauty within our hearts. We should all grow lazy and selfish, for our training would be too much like kindergarten work. Kindergarten methods are only suitable for little children. Those who are bringing forth fruit must be cultured, in order that they may bring forth more fruit. God will give

us the best training that we are able to make use of. We shall not be able to say, when we look back from the door of Death, that He answered our prayers to our harm.

Peace comes from humble and trustful prayer, not from the wild petition to have our own way at any cost. God, Who loves us enough to give us the greatest conceivable Gift—His own Son, and the indwelling Holy Spirit—may be safely trusted to give us all lesser good things. We really desire most the best gifts, which will help us to grow strong and brave ; and God is ready to give these as soon as we want them enough to ask for them earnestly. We should only be injured if we won them too easily. The best teachers will not help children overmuch with their lessons, even though such help might result in swift and easy progress. Rapid progress is not always thorough, and God knows we have all eternity to grow in. His plants are not ripened in a hot-house, but in an open vineyard, which He has fenced about and planted with the "Choicest Vine." He says : "What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in 't ?"

If we prefer to be let comfortably alone, without any purging and pruning, then it is time we gave up professing to be Christians. Have we not promised to trust Him ? What chance of trusting have we when we have no troubles and no difficulties ? A

life entirely free from troubles might be easy and comfortable, but it would be very enervating, and a great disappointment to a man who had nerved himself for a real battle and a victory worth the winning. The message sent to Saul of Tarsus in his blindness was : "I will shew him how great things he must suffer for My Name's sake." Let us also be inspired by difficulty, rejoicing if we are called to follow in the steps of One Who dared to drink the cup of pain for love of His brethren. Let us ask more earnestly for courage and strength to endure than for ease and comfort. We desire to be like our Lord, how is it that we grumble at the slightest discomfort ?

We know that to form the habit of always choosing the easiest and pleasantest thing within reach is to steadily weaken ourselves, so that when we are tested unexpectedly we find ourselves to be selfish cowards. Not long ago two men and a woman were on the ice at Niagara, and the men could have saved themselves if they had been willing to desert their weaker companion. How little those two men thought that morning, when they faced another ordinary day, that before night they should be tried and tested and should gloriously stand the test. The test never makes a hero or a coward, it is the everyday living that does that. There is the trifling sacrifice of inclination, the effort to do cheerfully the disagreeable duties which might

be shirked, the refusal to gain an advantage at another's expense, the brave confession of wrongdoing, the patient endurance of injustice or bodily pain—it is by such things as these that a soul grows in beauty and strength.

One who had suffered much said, as she walked through the valley of the shadow, that she had learned what her special work was to be in the future. "I am to help other people to bear pain," she said. What a joy it must be to her now to have won—through patient endurance—the power of helping loved ones on earth to climb from strength to strength. How light the past affliction must seem now to such glad and strong helpers. The affliction was short and light as compared with the eternal weight of glory.

If you love one who is called to the great task of suffering, do not be shortsighted enough to think God is making a mistake. When this probation is over and the soul passes out eager-eyed to the work of the great life beyond the misty veil, you may perhaps wish that you too had been given such pain-won power. Instead of blaming the Divine Husbandman for His severe pruning of that fruitful branch, you may perhaps ask: "Why was I given such an easy time?"

Those who are enduring the Master's purging, may rejoice as they remember that each pain, bravely accepted and patiently borne, has even now

THE PRUNING OF BRANCHES III

been transformed into spiritual power. Its virtue has entered into them and made them stronger and more beautiful in spirit, more able to clasp helpfully the hand of their weaker comrades.

"Measure thy life by loss instead of gain :
Not by the wine drunk, but the wine poureth forth ;
For love's strength standeth in love's sacrifice :
And whoso suffers most hath most to give."

CHAPTER XI

THE DESERT RECLAIMED

I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree ; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together.—ISA. xli. 18, 19.

BY means of artificial irrigation many desert places have been reclaimed and made to blossom as the rose. The miracles wrought in the physical world have their counterpart in the higher realm of the spiritual. Many a life has been transformed by the indwelling spirit of God, by the Water of Life which flows from the Throne on High. There is great joy in Heaven when a soul has been reclaimed, when the Divine Husbandman has succeeded in softening a hard heart and has planted there living seeds.

But we must not make the mistake of thinking that it is better to sow wild oats at first and then reform. It is a beautiful thing to lay an unstained life, like a pearl of great price, in the hand of God. If He calls His angels to rejoice with Him over a degraded soul crying out for purity, how much more must He rejoice over a dear and loving child who has never brought shame and disgrace on his Father's Name by a life of wilful sin.

A tiny baby is pure and innocent as it lies smiling in its mother's arms, with the dew of baptism still sparkling on its brow ; but—how can it help being innocent ? It has not chosen purity, has not loved and followed holiness, but has received it unconsciously as a gift from the Father. If that kind of unconscious innocence should go on for twenty years, we should say sadly, "The man is an idiot." When God gives us mind and free-will we must fight our way upward or sink downward.

But if the soul has been like a barren desert for years, bringing forth no fruit worth anything, is there any possibility of real restoration ? That is one of the grandest things about the Bible. It does not only encourage the man who has always tried to live rightly, but it holds up a glorious hope to encourage those who have made shipwreck of righteousness.

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD : though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." It hardly seems possible, does it ? No wonder the woman who was scorned as "a sinner" was drawn to the feet of One Who had power on earth to forgive sins, and wash away the defilement which filled her with shame and misery. She was helpless to cleanse herself—so are we all. The Pharisees were not attracted by the Great Absolver, because they did not know their own need of forgiveness.

114 IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM

The song of David : "He restoreth my soul," may be our glad thought every morning. Every day is the beginning of a new year. We may try to forget the sins of the past, but forgetfulness will never wipe them out of existence. Let us open up all the desert places, telling God about our sins and failures. Let us keep open all the avenues of approach to Him, so that the life-giving streams of power may flow in through all the channels He has prepared. If we neglect the appointed channels of prayer, sacraments and Bible-reading, we have only ourselves to blame when our lives are barren and unsatisfactory.

The prophet Joel says that the wasted years eaten by the locust may be restored. God is constantly making all things new, and giving us a fresh start. We failed yesterday to come anywhere near our ideals. Let us ask forgiveness, and then give up fretting over past mistakes and sins. With eyes turned away from ourselves, upward towards the Light of the world, let us go forward in joyous hope. Now is the only time we possess—just this present moment. The past—a moment ago—has already slipped out of our hands. The future has not yet been given to us. We can't handle it until it arrives, so we only injure ourselves in body, mind and spirit by fretting or worrying about its possible dangers and troubles.

God has given us plenty of parables to teach trustfulness. Year after year we see the flowers fade and the trees become bare and apparently lifeless. The earth is frozen and the song of the birds dies out. All seems hopeless ; but we have lived through many winters and always found that the gloomy desolation of the landscape was conquered by the fresh beauty of spring. As it has been before we expect it to be again. We do not sorrow, as those who have no hope, over the dying flowers. We had to bear pain and trouble many years ago. Where are those heavy sorrows now ? The life which seemed so dreary and hopeless has blossomed out in fresh interest and gladness.

As it has been before, so it will be again. The winter of sorrow will soon be over and the sunshine will come again. That hope makes it possible to bear dark days for a little while. The sunshine may be nearer than we think. If you are ever inclined to be hopeless, if you think there is no way out of your present troubles, remember—

"That Calvary and Easter Day,
Earth's happiest day and heaviest day,
Were but one day apart."

Good Friday's sun set in blackest darkness. How could the loving, brokenhearted disciples expect that their Sun would rise in joy ?

We can endure patiently, trust triumphantly, and hope gloriously if we are sure that the steadily-darkening gloom of our sorrow is only like the short darkness of night—a darkness leading surely and swiftly to the joy that cometh in the morning.

Joy is our duty as well as our privilege. We dishonour our Master when we sorrow hopelessly over anything. Easter gladness is not like the untried happiness of one who has never tasted sorrow. It is the joy of Him Who has gone down into the depths and risen again, the joy He offers to His own.

Are you looking back regretfully because your life has been wasted in self-seeking, and has brought forth no fruit for the King? No one has ever looked back and said sorrowfully: "I wish I had not wasted my life in serving Christ." Then it is evident which kind of life is most satisfactory, even before death seals the record. Choose this day Whom you will serve. Offer your life to God afresh, if you have already chosen His service. Kneel at His feet each morning and consecrate the new day to Him. Kneel at His feet at noon and feel the touch of His hand on your bowed head. Then go on your way strengthened and refreshed. Kneel at His feet in the evening for the peace of forgiveness and cleansing. Restoration is a real thing. When we say, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins," we are declaring a far greater truth than

just the fact of God's kindly overlooking our offence against Him. A child may be disobedient and his father may forgive him, but that does not wash away the sin. We can never be satisfied if our sins are only overlooked and forgotten. We want the stain washed away and the guilt lifted from our consciences. No one but God can forgive sins ; and even He can only work the great miracle of restoration through the One Sacrifice offered for the sins of the whole world. If one sin can really be washed away, then the Saviour has proved His claim and right to save the worst of sinners. Over and over He has proved His power. Let the Salvation Army testify to thousands of wrecked lives restored to beauty and fruitfulness. General Booth's command to his workers to "Go for sinners, and go for the worst," was founded on the conviction that God was able and willing to reclaim desert ground and change it into a fertile garden.

Innumerable times has the promise of Isaiah been fulfilled : "In the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the glowing sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water." To-day is ours, fresh and new from the hand of God. Our forgiveness is a costly treasure, bought with the life-blood of our Master ; let us accept it in solemn thankfulness, rejoicing in our dearly-won purity and guarding it as a priceless thing.

"No one, I say, is conquered till he yields :
And yield he need not, while, like mist from glass,
God wipes the stain from life's old battlefields,
From every morning that He brings to pass."

We are made in the image of God, therefore we can never be satisfied with our progress until we become like our Father—even though we may have to aspire and climb through all eternity to reach that infinite height of perfection.

In the Temple there was a heavy curtain hung before the Most Holy Place, as a sign that sin was a barrier between man and God. When the Great Sacrifice was completed that barrier was instantly torn down by God Himself. There was no delay, the way was open as soon as possible : and how the Father must have rejoiced when that Living Way was "new-made for us." Christ is The Way, that Ladder of hope between earth and heaven, which Jacob saw in vision. The Way is always open, but we are too often so engrossed with our pleasure or business that we fail to take advantage of the opportunity of drawing near to God.

If the value of our prayers determines very largely the measure of our own progress and the help we are able to give others, then it is no wonder that we bring forth little fruit. We are apt to live constantly in a rush, and prayer—because we don't prize it—is too often put aside for a convenient season. Then we are weak, and the people

THE DESERT RECLAIMED

113

we desire to help and ought to help do not gain much from fellowship with us.

Sometimes the reclaiming of a desert-soul seems very hopeless. A man may have been for years indulging secret sins against the sacred trust God has committed to his keeping—his own body. Perhaps he fancies that this sinful secret can always be hidden from view, that he can reform when he chooses, and that he is doing no one any harm. But one day his eyes are opened. He is a slave and chained by evil habit, though he would give a great deal to be free. His hand shakes, his secret is written on his face, and all the world can see that he is a wreck of his former self. What awful folly it is for a man to walk straight towards ruin and misery, with thousands of warnings to open his eyes.

Perhaps a man—or even, it may be, a woman—cherishes secret thoughts which sully the fair purity of soul which is God's sweetest gift to a child-heart. Slowly, but with terrible certainty, the corruption spreads. Then the Vision of God is lost, and the soul wakes up in the horror of a great darkness to find that faith has fled. No arguments can bring light in such a case. Only the pure in heart can enjoy the blessedness of the Vision of God's Face. When poisonous thoughts have been cherished for years it is not an easy thing to dismiss them from the mind. Or, it may be, that the mind is

weakened by the constant reading of trashy or debasing books. Slowly the harm is done, and the taste for uplifting literature is lost. The mind which ought to have been a help to the world is powerless and degraded. Or the life-barrenness may be the result of staying away from public worship in church. Christ has promised to be in the midst of those who gather together in His Name. If we stay away, without good reason, He only can measure the loss we sustain. He only knows the heights we might have reached if we had sought Him in His House and had eaten of the Bread which came down from Heaven. Some may have dropped the habit of daily prayer, cutting themselves off from fellowship with their Divine Head. As wisely might a vine-branch try to thrive without constant supplies of life from the vine.

Carelessness about sacred things may seem to be a little sin, but it can do deadly work in the soul of a man. It is such a common thing to be neglectful of God's offered forgiveness and help, that men may try to excuse themselves on the ground that nearly everybody is more enthusiastic and energetic in the pursuit of worldly advantages than of spiritual. But is it any satisfaction to one who is in a slow "decline" to know that there are many other sick people in the world? It is a matter of the greatest importance to each of us to have the soul strong and vigorous. The most disastrous of

all failures would be to gain the whole world and lose one's own soul. It would be as terrible a mockery as to be dying of starvation and thirst in a desert, surrounded by piles of gold and silver. The body can't be nourished by money. Misers sometimes die of starvation, clutching useless gold. And many people are starving their souls while they eagerly pile up worldly wealth. No wonder our Lord says to such a deluded man : "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee : then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?"

One reason people are so careless about spiritual privileges is because they fancy they can at any moment put out a hand and take them. They intend to seek God some day, but "there is no particular hurry." So many things are pressing, and God is kind and forgiving. He will accept and forgive them any moment when they can find time to ask for help. That is the way many people act when an insidious disease is slowly destroying their bodies. Treatment by a skilful doctor can set the matter right, they are sure, but "there is no hurry." When at last they bestir themselves it may be too late. How often a doctor is forced to say : "Why didn't you come to me sooner ? The disease has been so neglected that now there is no chance of cure."

God is able to change a desert into a garden, and yet it is not safe to delay. He can wash away the guilt from a penitent soul—but how do you know that you will be penitent another day, if you do not hate your sins to-day? Are you listening for the word of restoration to-day? If not, then you are slowly but surely hardening your heart. You are wilfully blocking the way of the Master Who is trying to change the desert places of your soul into a fertile and lovely garden.

There is a legend of a saint who saw in a vision Satan standing before the Throne. The evil spirit said to God: "Why hast Thou condemned me, who have offended but once, whilst Thou savest thousands of men who have offended many times?"

The stern, unanswerable reply he received was: "Hast thou once asked pardon of Me?"

God is pledged to forgive to the uttermost all sinners who plead the merits of the Great Sacrifice, all penitent sinners who hate their sins and are struggling after holiness. Do you care? Have you asked forgiveness, with earnest purpose to fight a lifelong fight against sin? If so, then the power of the Divine Husbandman can make all the desert spots in your life to blossom as the rose, He can plant in you the graces which He desires to find growing to perfection in your heart. There is no need of discouragement because you cannot see the development of the soul-garden. It is not

THE DESERT RECLAIMED

123

God's way to make plants suddenly, nor suddenly to change a sinner into a saint. Gardens are never made in a day.

"You ask for the effect to follow cause
Too soon and visibly. 'Twere well to wait—
The pears upon my trees are still but green,
But they will ripen in the summer sun.
Our vanity would do all things at once :
God takes His time, and puts us all to shame.
I am for trust, for working with a will,
And waiting long to see what comes of it."

CHAPTER XII

TRANSPLANTED BY THE KING

Those that are planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God . . . they shall be full of sap and green.—Ps. xcii. 13, 14 (Rev. Ver.)

IF you were a plant in an earthly garden, and you saw that the gardener came from time to time and removed a lily or a tree from the enclosure which formed your visible universe, how troubled you would be—unless you had confidence in the gardener. If he were the owner of the garden, with a special love for each plant, you would know that those removed from your sight were safe in his keeping. Perhaps they were too tender to stand the coming winter and needed to be sheltered. Perhaps they were so beautiful and fragrant that he wanted them in his choicest garden or in the courts of his house. You could not see them, but you rejoiced with them in their promotion, and looked forward to the time when you also should be transplanted.

Through the prophet Esdras (see Apocrypha) God speaks of those who have received the gift of everlasting tabernacles. He says : "They shall have the tree of life for an ointment of sweet savour : they shall neither labour nor be weary . . . the

kingdom is already prepared for you : watch
And those that be dead will I raise up again from
their places I have sanctified and pre-
pared for thee twelve trees laden with divers fruits,
and as many fountains flowing with milk and honey,
and seven mighty mountains whereupon there
grow roses and lilies, whereby I will fill thy children
with joy."

Esdras was also shown a great company of people
"which are departed from the shadow of the world,
and have received glorious garments of the Lord."
These were clothed in white, as a token that they
had fulfilled the law of the Lord. In the midst of
them was a young man of a high stature, taller than
all the rest, and upon every one of their heads he
set crowns. An angel explained that the giver of
the crowns was the Son of God, Whom they had
confessed in the world.

In the Book of Ecclesiasticus Wisdom says :
"I will water my best garden, and will water abun-
dantly my garden bed : and lo, my brook became a
river, and my river became a sea."

Can we not trust ourselves and those who are
dear to us in the hands of the King ? He is Wisdom
and Love ; and His choice of plants to be trans-
planted into His "best garden"—a garden inclosed—
should be accepted not only submissively but
thankfully. There must be sorrow in this garden
of earth when a fruitful tree is removed to the

courts of the King, when a fragrant rose or lovely lily is taken into His own house ; but if we follow them in spirit as they flourish in the sunshine of Paradise, the joy in their hearts cannot fail to overflow into ours.

When we say, as Christians often do, that a young and promising life is "cut off" in its prime, we are venturing to place our judgment above God's wisdom. "Cut off !" when the King Himself has chosen it to beautify His best garden ? "Cut off !" when it is planted beside the great river of life which flows from the Throne of God ? Is life here so perfect that we cannot conceive of a higher one ?

Enoch pleased God, and "God took him." For thousands of years that high honour has made his name great. What if he or his friends had despised the favour of the Most High, and he had clung desperately to this earthly life ! What if Elijah had fled in fear when the Royal chariot arrived to take him swiftly into the presence of his Master !

But, you may object, Enoch and Elijah were not like the rest of us. They were lifted out of this world without going through the dreadful gate of Death.

True, they were ; and God showed in this way that He delighted to do them honour ; but there was One Whose life of perfect obedience pleased Him even more. The Son of God was honoured by

being invited to stand side by side with His brethren and submit to their earthly conditions.

Enoch and Elijah were translated, escaping the pain of death ; but our loved Leader (the Lord of Life) went bravely through the pain and humiliation, refusing to call to His aid the angels who would gladly have borne Him, like Elijah, out of the reach of Death.

If you were given your choice, which would you choose to follow ? Look at Elijah in his glorious chariot, mounting swiftly to his reward. Then look at the King on His cross, royally ignoring His own agony as He speaks mighty words of pardon, encouragement and tenderness to those who need His help. Which of these two made most glorious entrance into the new life ? Which conquers our hearts ?

We may shrink in fear when the Master says "Follow Me !" but that is because of our weak cowardice. God is showing us high favour when He invites us to walk—even through the darkness of death—in the steps of the Great Son of Man.

Those who are transplanted from this garden of earth seem to be torn away from loving fellowship with dear ones. We feel lonely, and it seems as if they must feel lonely too. But perhaps they have learned, more perfectly than we, the power and gladness of spiritual fellowship. We say, "I believe in the Communion of Saints ;" but do we really

believe ? Do we constantly make use of the power God has given us, the power of reaching out in spirit to touch those we love ?

Rossetti describes the "blessed damozel" as she stands on the rampart of God's house, leaning over the gold bar of heaven ; while souls mounting up to God flame past her unnoticed. She is so high that, looking down, she scarce can see the sun ; while the earth "spins like a fretful midge" far down in the void below. And yet she is so near her lover on the earth that he can hear her voice in the song of the birds and in the chime of the mid-day bells. They two are not separated, but she is steadily drawing his soul higher.

"'I wish that he were come to me,
For he will come,' she said.
'Have I not prayed in Heaven ?—on earth,
Lord, Lord, has he not prayed ?
Are not two prayers a perfect strength ?
And shall I feel afraid ?'"

We shall soon grow accustomed to the new life, as we grow accustomed here to the change from childhood to manhood or womanhood, in ourselves and others. We shall step out of this part of the King's domain into the Royal Park of Paradise, and we shall not even have to go alone that short distance. The Master Who is our joy here will be with us there. After passing through death, He was still the same JESUS, and He will be unchanged

through all the ages of eternity. We, like the Apostles, shall be glad when we see the Lord. There would be no joy in leaving this world unless we were going to be "with Christ,"—a closer, dearer fellowship than we have ever yet known. A Professor who had studied much was drawing near to death. A friend was one day reading to him one of the learned books that he used to enjoy. "Oh, I'm awfully tired of it !" he exclaimed. Then he spoke about the Living Christ, and said, "There is nothing else of any use to me now."

Our own experience tells us that we grow away from and tire of earthly pursuits, and the dearest earthly joys may slip out of our grasp ; but we cannot grow beyond the fellowship of Christ. His love will satisfy us more and more. The experience of those who have passed triumphantly or peacefully into the unseen life, leaning confidently on the Beloved Master, makes us certain that He can and will help us safely through the trial of removal.

"Be ready to the reward of the kingdom, for the everlasting light shall shine upon you for evermore. Flee the shadow of this world, receive the joyfulness of your glory : I testify my Saviour openly. O receive the gift that is given you, and be glad, giving thanks unto Him that hath called you to the heavenly kingdom." So wrote a seer, many years ago. Are those words out of date ? We must enter the dark valley of the shadow—how

130 IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM

can we help wanting to know whether sunshine lies beyond it?

Our Lord's tender promise to His friends was that He would prepare a place for them. When we begin our life in this earth-garden we find a place prepared. The home-people open their arms to receive us. They love us when we have done nothing to deserve love. They provide for our wants and our pleasures. So our Elder Brother is preparing for us a home among the many mansions of the Golden City. He will also be our escort and guide, for His promise is, "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself." We know many things now of which we were once ignorant, but the knowledge has come gradually as we were able to assimilate it. So our Lord has many things to say unto us which we cannot understand here.

"God's plans like lilies pure and white unfold :
We must not tear the close-shut leaves apart,
Time will reveal the calyxes of gold.
And if, through patient toil, we reach the land
Where the tired feet, with sandals loosed, may rest,
Where we shall clearly see and understand,
I think that we will say, 'God knew the best.' "

If your friend should die, apparently unrepentant and unbelieving, there is no need for despair. The mother of the penitent thief might have been broken-hearted about the future of her son, if that wonderful appeal from the cross of shame had only been

whispered from the heart of the dying man into the ear of his Divine Friend. Many souls, who give no outward sign of belief in Christ, may have heard His voice saying softly, "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." The seeds of holiness may have taken root in the heart, even though the growth may be hidden from the sight of men—and there is all eternity ahead for development. Do you think souls cease to grow when they step out into the sunshine of the "Garden Inclosed?" If "to depart and to be with Christ" means to cease growing into His likeness, then I should think it would be "far better" to remain here, where progress is possible.

Of course we know that we are on probation here, while the opportunities which may lie before us after death are not clearly made known to us. It is only at our deadly peril that we treat carelessly the offer of salvation held out to us now. God is not mocked—we must expect to reap the harvest which we are to-day sowing, the harvest of wheat or tares. But those other souls are not ours to judge; to acquit or condemn. They belong to God Who loves them with a never-failing love. Dare we question the wisdom of His dealings with any of His children? Need we doubt His love or despair of His power to save?

The question is often asked whether we shall know each other and remember the past, in the

new life beyond death. How can we doubt it? God is Love, and all earthly love is His Life in the hearts of His children. Love is in its nature eternal, the greatest thing we can conceive of; but it would be very poor if it could not survive death, or if it lost the tender memory of the past. We can rest safely on the Love of our Father, knowing that He will fully satisfy our hungry hearts, which would be terribly disappointed if human fellowship were interrupted or destroyed.

"Yet our beloved seem so far
The while we yearn to feel them near,
Albeit with Thee we trust they are.
He smiled, 'And I am here!'"

Those who have passed into the inner Garden are with Christ. We also are with Him in this Garden. How can we be really separated when He is here as well as there? There are mysteries in fellowship which are beyond our comprehension. How can we secure our Master's full attention when we kneel at His feet and gaze up into His face? It seems as if we should be crowded out by the thronging multitudes, never getting near enough to touch even the hem of His garment. We can't understand how He can give perfect attention and fellowship to millions of souls at once; and yet innumerable witnesses declare that He—and He only—has met and satisfied their highest cravings.

We cannot yet understand the life beyond death—can we understand this life?—but we shall still be ourselves, and God will always provide opportunity for our spiritual hunger to be satisfied. When I hear that a beautiful soul has been called up higher, my first instinct is to send congratulations to his friends on his behalf. The sorrow seems trifling in comparison with the wonderful joy that is his. The mourners may possibly misunderstand my letters of sympathy; but while I am carried away by the thought of a soul in the first bliss of radiant joy it is not easy to weep with those who weep. Sympathy for the earthly grief comes afterwards.

In all God's Garden of earth there is no lovelier flower than a little innocent child. The children are sent down to cheer the heavy-hearted, to bless and purify the homes of rich and poor, and to lead weary hearts to their home in the Father's Heart. This world would be a very dreary place, and men and women would grow hard and selfish, if it were not for the dear, troublesome, glad-hearted little ones. God loves the world, therefore He sends us babies every year. One little girl said to her mother: "I think God must have looked all through heaven to find the very prettiest baby for us."

Was it any wonder that the Master lifted little children into His arms and pressed them against His heart? One of the happiest hours of His earthly life must have been when He

"Took the brown little babes in the holy
 White hands of the Saviour of men ;
 Held them close to His heart and caressed them,
 Put His face down to theirs as in prayer,
 Put their hands to His neck, and so blessed them,
 With baby hands hid in His hair."

I don't know who wrote those lines, but they can hardly fail to go to your heart if you treasure the love of God's little children.

Is it any wonder that He sometimes lifts them into His arms now to be trained and perfected in the sunny fields of Paradise ? What joy it must be to Him to walk among the roses and lilies on the seven mighty mountains.

Here, or there, we are still in the Garden with Christ. What that Presence means to us in life and in death ! There is a story told of two Japanese soldiers who lay mortally wounded after a battle with the Russians. One dragged himself to the side of his comrade and tried to cheer him in the hour of death. The other smiled as he said gratefully : "Do not trouble about me, friend, for I am a Christian and not afraid to die."

Joyously the first soldier bent over his companion and whispered : "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil : for Thou art with me."

I am not saying that the story is an actual fact, but the point is that it easily might have happened.

Only faith in the God of Love could produce such an effect ; but, in the history of Christianity, a joyous passage through the dark valley is a commonplace. To be sure of the Presence of the Great Companion is to fear no evil, even when death calls us to go out into the unknown. When wealth, fame or learning are helpless to cheer a dying man, when even the dearest earthly friend must unloose his tender clasp, then One dearer still speaks through the darkness :

"I have called thee by My Name ; thou art Mine.
When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee.
. . . . Fear not : for I am with thee."



